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# **Intercultural Encounters: PR China**

## **Students in Singapore**

By

Georgina Chung

A thesis in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

School of Education

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## **ABSTRACT**

There are more than a billion people learning English as a second language around the world, and the majority of those language learners are in China. However, so many go overseas to learn English that Chinese learners of English is probably the largest national group of language students in the world. This huge learner population of students of the English language has thus made phenomena such as those of study-abroad, sojourner and intercultural adjustment all the more important, and its implication for Singapore is also significant.

The purpose of this research, therefore, investigates the adjustment of PR China students to life in Singapore. It attempts to elicit those factors that affect the study's 18 students and examines to what extent those factors promote and hinder their adjustment to the new environment. While most empirical studies of intercultural adjustment were conducted on students adjusting to host cultures that were very different to their own, this study looks at the adjustment of students whose culture shares more similarities than differences with the host country. This research of intercultural adjustment is therefore unique, especially when the complex of attitudes, beliefs and practices may reveal that adjustment can be problematic despite cultural and even ethnic similarities. It also attempts to relate to other studies where considerable research on the intercultural adjustment of students has already been done, and intends to link, where possible, to general and interaction adjustment domains that represent those factors that most confront student sojourners. Studies in the Asian region are also scrutinized for relevant and related areas that could directly inform this study.

The findings show that the students found their adjustment to life in Singapore problematic, and that there are many physical aspects in the environment, ranging from food to the weather, that have affected their adjustment. Only a quarter of the students reported some adjustment but the rest found it difficult to adjust to those physical aspects.

Moreover, the study also found that interaction adjustment is affected by the students' attitudes towards Singlish, a variety of English which is used commonly by most Singaporeans, with some claiming that they would return home if they did not acquire enough English to achieve their learning goals. They believed that the practice of English outside school was an important part of their language acquisition and that their exposure to Singlish did nothing to help them improve their language skills. There were also other problems of adjustment when over two-thirds of the students complained they felt that locals were prejudiced towards them. Moreover, the study also found the students were more prone to confusion when they perceived there were more cultural differences than similarities.

The study used a combination of methods to collect data, involving observation, interviews, questionnaires and written documents. In a sense, triangulation is achieved when more than one method is used, resulting in greater confidence in the findings.

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## **DECLARATIONS**

This work has not previously been submitted for a higher degree or diploma in a university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material, previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Signed :

Name : Georgina Chung

Date : 31<sup>st</sup> January 2007

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to offer a contribution to the analysis of intercultural adjustment by describing and explaining the result of exposure and contact in a new and unfamiliar cultural environment. The specific focus is the theory of adjustment held by PR China sojourner students in Singapore, and the implications this has for scientific theories proposed by researchers. The students' theories are a complex of beliefs, attitudes and practices influenced by promoting and hindering factors in the new environment, but which has to date received relatively little attention. Intercultural adjustment is believed by researchers to be easier when there is cultural similarity between the sojourning and host groups (e.g. Byrne's (1969) similarity-attraction hypothesis; Torbiorn's (1982) culture-distance hypothesis). However, this theory requires further investigation in the context of individuals who are culturally more similar than different, as in the situation of PR China students in Singapore.

For the students, studying in Singapore includes many general aspects of the intercultural adjustment experience, going through new life events, coping with environmental changes, and interacting with others from different cultural or linguistic backgrounds. Peculiar to this situation is that they share many cultural similarities with the majority Chinese ethnic group of the new country, with which they come most into contact, yet still encounter some adjustment problems that typify cross-cultural transitions and student sojourns. Past and present theories attempt to explain sojourner distress, but there has been no grand theory representing the final word on the phenomenon. While this study concentrates on the context of PR China student sojourners in Singapore, it also attempts to relate it to other studies where considerable research on student sojourn has already been done, and in the process, hopes to shed some light on adjustment, particularly where both cultures share more similarities than differences.

### 1.1 The significance of the study

In the course of teaching English to the students in this study, questions and speculation on their adjustment to life in Singapore not only had some pedagogic relevance but they also grew into a viable area of research. What started as personal interest soon became a stronger desire to investigate those phenomena more academically so as to address such questions and also to develop it into formal research.

In the beginning, thinking about the students' adjustment was just simply following a hunch that they were encountering problems of adjustment despite having many cultural similarities with the host community. This naïve view led to taking a deeper look into the issue, which not only became intriguing but also had potential for research, to the extent that the line became blurred when encountering those questions that confronted both areas of personal and research interests. Much of the 'fieldwork' involved participant observation that had started long before the idea of writing academically about them surfaced, and by the time a research concept was realized, the already-established relationship with the students had, to some extent, sensitized the researcher to the situation. Some of the reflections are noted here to express how the journey began, from trivial musings to concrete inquiry.

At first, there was the question of what was happening specifically in the minds and actions that took place in the setting of the PR China students in Singapore. Their behaviour and reactions to the problems they faced in their daily life seemed to form a pattern, and although it was not an unfamiliar ongoing process to both teachers and students alike, it became clear that studying it closely through an academic endeavor would enable the researcher to have a deeper understanding of it, if it could be done through an attempt to systematically document what was considered commonplace into a research work. Therefore, the research implication lay in its ability to discover factors that affected adjustment, namely hindering and promoting factors, understand them from their perspectives, as well as have the potential of it all being written as research.

Then, it was also interesting to know the ways everyday life in the school setting was organized compared with other ways of organizing social life in different settings outside the school. In the process, some questions came to mind: Were there problems of adjustment outside the school setting as well as inside? What were the problems? How did they cope with them? Thus, this aspect of research implied looking at the ways PR China students organized their life outside the school setting and how they coped.

Lastly, it was interesting to know how this study would fit into the wider context of student mobility within East Asia and, in particular, PR China students going for studies in Singapore. Elsewhere, however, the United States is said to be one of the most popular countries for Chinese students' study-abroad goals, with thousands thronging to the country for advance studies in science, technology, market economy and English. The United Kingdom has also received a total of over 6,000 students for post graduate and undergraduate studies, and the numbers will continue to increase as the Chinese government has announced that the number of students sent abroad will be doubled by 2010 (Leon, 2000).

However, no organization is able to provide reliable statistics indicating the exact number of English learners both inside and outside China, although it can be said that China has the largest English language learning population in the world. In its endeavour to develop the country into an educational hub, Singapore's desire to attract foreign students seems to coincide with China's continuing boom in foreign language education. This is witnessed in China's strong and growing conviction that English competence, as well as computer skills, in the last 20 years became a must for the younger generation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, thus making English language the most popular-as well as compulsory- subject for students of all age groups. Singapore, thus, attracts PR China students as a natural choice, with the probable reason that both countries are similar in terms of culture. Therefore, in the past decade, there has been an increasing number of mainland Chinese academics and students to Singapore (Tsang, 2001), and they continue to enroll in English language courses in various institutions in the country. This study, therefore takes a look at the ways in which its aspects correspond to those studies that have already been



done along similar lines, and what it implies for Singapore and its attraction for PR China students. It also reviews literature and theories produced by such studies, attempts to present some contributions as well as discuss limitations and challenges, and eventually make some recommendations for further research.

It was necessary then, to make specific steps to address such aspects of inquiry, by formulating research questions that encapsulated the central issues, and also to fulfill several criteria: that there was supervisory agreement the inquiry was 'researchable', i.e. allowing a study to be conducted in relation to the questions and advice on ways to implement the thesis, that there was sufficient literature on which the study was able to draw to illuminate it, and that, at the very least, the study could hold out the prospect of being able to make an original contribution – however small - to a specific area of intercultural adjustment.

## 1.2 Research questions

One of the main purposes of the research is to answer many open-ended questions on the adjustment of the students and to obtain from them sufficient relevant data for an analysis. Since personal interest in the topic initiated the inquiry, it was necessary to formulate the research questions as close as possible to those areas in which the researcher was specifically interested. Therefore this research is driven by the following specific enquiries:

1. What factors affect and influence the students in their adjustment to life in Singapore?
2. To what extent do these factors hinder or promote their adjustment?
3. Are there aspects peculiar only in the context of adjustment to Singapore?
4. To what extent would the students' theory of adjustment be comparable to established theories of intercultural adjustment, and what this could contribute to the development of established theories?

Question 1 guides the researcher in deciding what data to collect so that the scope is kept to the students' intercultural experiences in Singapore. It had come to the researcher's attention that there were indeed a few factors in the environment that seemed to exert more influence than others on their adjustment, and that these needed to be brought out. In question 2, the researcher has the task of uncovering those factors that both hinder or promote adjustment, and the affective outcomes of those events. To extract a true picture, it was important to know to what extent those factors affect them, and the nature of the outcomes. The researcher in question 3 hopes to be able to depict a novel aspect of intercultural adjustment by representing the contextualisation of the study. This would place general explanations and theories for intercultural adjustment in a specific context and look at the ways in which it relates to existing theories. Question 4 requires the research to examine the extent of connections between students' own 'common sense' theories and established theories and research, as well as how well and how much such types of student sojourn theories have been addressed in intercultural adjustment literature. This means there should be pertinent literature to help illuminate how the research questions can be approached, and to what extent phenomena need further investigation.

The questions above define the topic of interest and establish parameters for the research design. It is hoped that the operational terms are sufficiently clear to guide an empirical study of the phenomenon by delineating where, with whom, and how it is carried out.

### 1.3 Methodology

Since the nature of the research involved having to understand verbal and written information from the informants, a qualitative research strategy seemed appropriate. To a large extent, the task of understanding their meanings is a hermeneutic one, involving interpreting and recounting accurately the meanings which the research informants give to the reality around them.

For the purpose of this research, an exclusively qualitative method of data collection and analysis, are suitable because the set of concerns (homesickness, boredom, disorientation etc) make up the phenomenon to be researched, and its intercultural aspect specifically can best be studied through a method where its strong link to phenomenology may provide answers on how the informants make sense of the world around them, and views it through their eyes.

The key informants are a group of eighteen students from mainland China who had just begun a new semester at the Centre of Language Study where the researcher teaches English. Altogether, these students had the requisite six years of foundation English language at school in China and, although their grasp of English syntax was typically strong, their speaking skills fell short of the standard of fluency enjoyed by most of their counterparts in Singapore. None of these students have had prior experience studying overseas, therefore, their adjustment to life in Singapore, with its many aspects, may be significant, in some ways, for the study of intercultural adjustment, especially where both cultures are more similar than different.

Data Collection Instruments include two questionnaires that facilitate the establishment of contextual factors and developing of common areas, such as measuring the strength of feeling the students have about culture shock and eliciting information on some personal history as well as how they view their social and physical worlds. Other instruments include interviews which are essential for eliciting in-depth information: it is through elicitation and personal interaction with the students that the investigation was better able to obtain data addressing the research questions. Written texts were also collected, more as a way of corroborating information obtained through the interviews.

Grounded theory provides the strategy in this study for conducting data analysis. Its core processes of coding and allowing theoretical ideas to emerge out of the data are followed so that theories of student adjustment are revealed; in this way, a standard of systemizing the data and analysis is followed, out of which there is a representation of their beliefs and views of adjustment.

## 1.4 Overview of the Chapters

This study is sectioned into five chapters with each reflecting its purpose and the way this research is structured. As a whole, it not only reports findings and draws conclusions, but also explains how research was done and outlines how analysis was carried out.

In Literature Review, theoretical accounts of contact, culture shock, intercultural interaction, study abroad phenomenon and student sojourners set the scene by introducing the major terms, problems and controversies in the field of intercultural adjustment. The various types of contact are mentioned briefly but the focus is on students who study abroad and encounter problems in such transitions. In particular, the chapter discusses the widely researched area of cultural distance, where much empirical evidence supports the hypothesis that similarity facilitates adjustment. There is discussion therefore of how this study relates to relevant literature and then attempts to locate it within a tradition of research in the area. Also, it notes that relatively little has been done on those students from Asian countries who study in Asian regions and whose culture is more similar than different to their own.

The Methodology chapter discusses several issues. A qualitative approach is used to probe into the informants' inner world in order to uncover some of the complexities that arise in their adjustment and interaction with their new learning and cultural environment. Moreover, the chapter discusses data collection methods, by participant observation, interviewing, questionnaires and written accounts that reflect an eclectic use of ways that are the most appropriate for gathering such kinds of data.

The Data Analysis chapter begins with a discussion on grounded theory and how it is employed as a framework for analyzing data in this research. It does not attempt to provide any definitive account of the approach but rather its use as an appropriate tool of coding, building categories, identifying their properties and the process of grounding theories in the data. The chapter also refers to engaging with pre-existing theories of relevant intercultural adjustment components, a step that is an important part in

developing grounded theory. As such, writing up the research also acts as a reminder that reviewing literature should link seamlessly not only with this chapter but also the rest of the thesis.

The Conclusion recalls the main foci of the research, and revisits the research questions as set out in this chapter. Although it is not the same as a summary, it does consolidate the findings by relating them and their discussion to the research questions. In other words, it has to make clear the implications of the findings for the research questions. Moreover, there are some suggested ways in which the findings have implications for theories relating to the area of interest, and also a proposition of how this area can be further researched and also some practical changes.

## CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### Historical overview of research and evolving theories on intercultural adjustment

Some of the earliest research on intercultural contact arose from examinations of migration and mental health but its origins were perhaps more sociopolitical than psychological, where findings had economic and political consequences that were used to support immigration screening programs, in particular in the United States (Furnham and Bochner, 1986). Much of the research, therefore, was done on immigrants but changes in research emphases also led investigators to go beyond mental-health issues related to migration to other concerns, such as changing values, identity and acculturation studies. However, while such studies were increasing and diversifying, a 'second strand of intercultural research' began to emerge in the field of international education' (ibid: p. 35)

As foreign student exchange programs began to gain momentum in the 1950s, research activities moved further away from the medical model of sojourner adjustment and the view of culture shock as a medical problem, and more towards the description and analysis of the social and psychological problems of overseas students. These early studies undertaken by researchers such as Sellitz *et al.* (1963), inquired into the adjustment of student sojourners, also mostly in the United States; similar studies were conducted by researchers in Great Britain, by Carey (1956), Singh (1963) and Tafjel and Dawson (1965). Many of such studies, however, were 'atheoretical' and used what Brislin and Baumgardner (1971) called 'samples of convenience' (in Ward, Furnham and Bochner, 2003:35) rather than well organised representative groups of participants. Moreover, they were criticized as 'anecdotal and frequently limited to descriptive accounts of the stages of cross-cultural transitions' (Ward, 1996:131). Best known among them is Oberg's (1960) four stages of culture shock that describe changes in emotional adjustment over time, or Adler's (1975) stages of contact, disintegration, reintegration and independence during cross-cultural transitions. Lysgaard (1955) extended the stage-wise theory by asserting that adjustment follows a U-shape curve theory with entry into

the new cultural milieu commencing in a positive manner. This was also criticized by Church (1982) as 'weak, inconclusive and overgeneralized' (Furnham and Bochner, 1982:542). More writers such as Klineberg and Hull (1979), Selby and Woods (1966) and Sewell and Davidsen (1961) proposed that a major problem has been that primarily cross-sectional research has been used to evaluate the U-curve theory, and given the nature of changes over time, Ward (1996) suggested that longitudinal investigations are more appropriate. However, although much work has gone into the description and taxominising, as mentioned above, descriptive studies can be useful as they provide an account and the extent of student problems, which allows one to get some idea of the consequences of and amount of problems from intercultural contact.

Although stage theories have declined and their utility has been disparaged by those who favour carefully conducted longitudinal research, the U-curve still seems to attract attention of researchers as its 'proposition is intuitively appealing' (Ward, Furnham and Bochner, 2001: 82). Research, such as Kealey's (1989) longitudinal study observed the U-curve pattern of psychological adjustment in about 10% of his sample. What this means, however, is that some people show the U-curve pattern of adjustment some of the time, and it may not even be useful for this study as its student sojourners do not commence their sojourn with the same attitudes and state of *euphoria* as other cross-cultural travelers such as tourists or short-term holiday makers. Ward and colleagues also found that the *euphoria* in Oberg's first stage of transition is more probably a 'state of at least moderate distress' (Ward, Furnham and Bochner, 2001: 81).

Despite the limitations, the evolving theories eventually led to the examination of the dynamic nature of the cross-cultural sojourn. From the 1980s, two specific theoretical approaches became more firmly established: the culture learning approach and the stress and coping approach, based on a psychological model. In the former, adjustment comes in the form of learning and acquiring the culture-specific skills and knowledge required to negotiate the new culture milieu (Bochner, 1982, 1986), such as language or communication competence (Furnham, 1993), quantity and quality of contact with host nationals (Bochner, 1982), culture distance (Ward and Kennedy, 1993a,b) cultural

identity (Ward and Searle, 1991) and cross-cultural training (Brislin, Landis and Brandt, 1983). It has been argued, however, that, although culture-specific knowledge is associated with enhanced sociocultural adjustment (Klineberg & Hull, 1979, Pruitt, 1978, and Ward and Searle, 1991), the sources of relevant knowledge may come from prior cross-cultural experience and/or training (Ward, 1996). Also, at the core of the theory rests the requirement that sojourners maintain bicultural relationships with host nationals in order to achieve intercultural communication competence. However, such relationships are not always possible, therefore making it difficult to easily acquire the requisite knowledge of social and behavioural skills involved in intercultural communication, and while this approach informs this study, it does not explain what the alternative is and specifically how culture shock problems can be overcome. Further research evidence indicates that in fact sojourners have very few host culture friends, and the limited contacts they have tend to be maintained for purely utilitarian reasons (Ward, Furnham and Bochner, 2001).

The latter stress and coping approach perceives transition as a series of stressful life changes that require coping responses, and has been strongly influenced by work on earlier theory and studies on life events, from researchers such as Holmes and Rahe (1967), whose life events construct aims to show that any change is intrinsically stressful, even though the event is a positive or desired one. Such theories on life events and changes are later discussed in connection with adjustment domains in another section. Moreover, Ward, Furnham and Bochner(2001) explain that the analytical framework is broad and incorporates both characteristics of the individual and characteristics of the situation that 'may facilitate or impede adjustment to a new cultural milieu' (p. 37), and as such, this theoretical approach is useful to the present study.

Thus, both theoretical approaches have come to liken cross-cultural adjustment to two broad processes: culture learning has at its centre the behavioural changes needed in order to adjust in the new setting, and stress and coping focuses on the emotional impact of culture contact, called sociocultural and psychological adjustment respectively.



Together, both portray individuals as actively responding to and dealing with their problems in practical ways.

Contemporary literature therefore has concerned itself with the skills and strategies that sojourners, such as students, use in adjusting to changes in new cultural environments. Theories are abundant in this field, but the most useful ones for this research would be those that provide the strongest link to the informants' own theories of adjustment and also the scope and orientation of the research investigations. As will be seen in later chapters, culture shock theories will illuminate the reasons behind students' responses – frustration, anxiety, uncertainty, anger, homesickness and loneliness. Even the controversial stage theories will help explain if sojourners need to go through all the stages in transition or skip one, or even a few. The culture learning approach informs this research because it helps in understanding that adjustment can be difficult and exhausting when it entails learning culture specific skills and knowledge for the process. The psychological model of stress and coping will help the researcher identify factors that affect the intercultural adjustment of the informants, what stressful life changes they encounter and how they cope with them. It will also enhance the examination of the variables as the analytical framework is broad enough, according to Ward, Furnham and Bochner (200), to incorporate the characteristics of the individual and of the situation that may facilitate or hinder their adjustment.

## 2.1 Sojourners

Sojourners, according to Furnham (1988) are those individuals who voluntarily spend between six months and five years in a new environment with the intention of returning at some point to their home culture; as such, international students fit into this category. The term *international student* has met with much debate: some argue that *foreign student* is preferred because it is less conceptually ambiguous than international student, but others suggest it has a negative connotation. In this study, the researcher uses Paige's (1996) definition of international students, to refer to those 'students who temporarily

reside in a country other than their home in order to participate in international educational exchange' (p. 162).

As the movement of students and scholars across boundaries became a phenomenon in most countries throughout the world (Paige, 1990), studies of sojourners and their relatively short-term cross-cultural adjustment proliferated. Moreover, because of their greater accessibility as research participants than other contact populations, such as migrants or expatriate sojourners, the psychological and educational literature on student sojourners is massive (e.g. Barker *et al.*, 1991; Furnham and Bochner, 1982; Klineberg & Hull, 1979; Zheng & Berry, 1991).

#### 2.1.1 Culture shock in sojourner literature

Most literature on sojourners point out that culture shock is present in the adjustment process, 'For most sojourners, then culture shock may simply be a stage in their gradual adjustment to cultural difference in the new environment.' (Burnett and Gardner, 2006: 66). Hammer (1992) noticed that extensive literature has thus far covered and described, to a large extent, both the problems of psychological well-being in encountering unfamiliar environmental demands during their sojourn overseas. (e.g. study on loneliness of international students by Sam and Eide, 1991; homesickness by Zheng and Berry, 1991; tolerance of ambiguity by Ward and Chang, 1997; Ward and Kennedy, 1992) as well as the learning and coping responses during such sojourns (e.g. Berry's (1997) Stress and Coping Framework; coping styles by Ward, Leong and Kennedy, 1998). In general, then, the empirical evidence tends to support an overall view that student sojourners have more problems than do host students, from insufficient linguistic and cultural skills to homesickness and loneliness (Furnham and Bochner, 1986).

#### 2.1.2 Sojourner research in Asian regions

Of particular importance to this research are those studies that are conducted in the Asia-Pacific rim, i.e. international students studying in countries of the region. Much of the

work on the adjustment of international students was initially conducted in North America (e.g. Pruitt, 1978; Wong-Reiger, 1984; Yang & Clum, 1995). The adjustment of Chinese students in Canada was also the topic of research by Dion and Dion (1996), who offer a theory on culture shock and the transition process in new environments. They point out that sojourning students must often adapt, not only to the common demands of student life, but to a culture with different values and customs to their own. Zheng and Berry (1991) also studied the acculturative stress in a similar sample, Chinese students to Canada. Therefore much of the research takes place in North America, prompting other researchers like Burnett and Gardner (2006) to remark that even for the UK and Ireland, in spite of the contributions by researchers like Murphy-Lejeune (2002), there has been relatively little research within their context.

An important point to make in favour of the importance and relevance of studies within the Asia-Pacific region to this study is that sojourner adjustment can be influenced by societal-level variables (Ward, 1996), where cultural origins, destinations and level of modernization play parts in facilitating or hindering adjustment (Ward, 1996). Therefore, studies that consist of Asian student sojourners to the Asian region (e.g. Tsang's (2001) study of Chinese students in Singapore) are not only specific in their characteristics but also theoretically relevant to this study.

Although scarce, there have been some studies on international students from outside the Asian region studying in far-east Asia (e.g. Matsubara and Ishikuma, 1993) or students from countries of the region studying in the region (e.g. Ward & Kennedy, 1993b; Tsang, 2001; Lam, 2006). Ward and Kennedy's comparative study of sojourner adjustment of Malaysian students in Singapore, and Malaysian and Singaporean students in New Zealand, show that there was no psychological adjustment between the two groups of students, but Malaysian students (said to be culturally and ethnically similar and geographically proximal) in Singapore experienced less sociocultural problems than Malaysian and Singaporean students in New Zealand. Ward and Chang's (1998) study of the adjustment of Hong Kong and mainland Chinese students in Singapore is similar in scope to the study of Tsang's (2001) study of mainland Chinese academics and students

to life in Singapore. Although they have samples and variables more or less common to this study, both of them use quantitative measures to develop their own models of intercultural adjustment but do not unearth the nature of the students' social reality that qualitative methods would do. Moreover, the categories of adjustment would be more helpful and meaningful if they are seen in a variety of ways, such as the view of Interaction Adjustment in the eyes of this study's PR China students to Singapore. The ethnographic study of Lam's group of mainland students in Hong Kong and a corresponding Hong Kong student-group to their mainland counterparts, examines mutual adjustment to each other. While the study contributes to general theories of adjustment of sojourners to new environments and in particular, the inner structure of the intercultural relationship between the two groups, its relevance to this study is limited by the differing research foci and goals of both studies, which are similar yet different in many ways.

### 2.1.3 Host national ties in sojourner studies

Other studies on student sojourners in non-Asian environments are also of theoretical relevance to this study because of their interpretations of intercultural adjustment and theoretical contributions to the field. Coelho (1958) and Selltiz and her colleagues (1963) found that host national ties have an effect on the psychological adjustment of sojourners. Their study of international students in the U.S. shows that certain original characteristics of students, along with certain conditions of their sojourn, (i.e. De Vos & Suarez-Prozo (1990a) explain that in schools, strangers, as students, are surrounded by and tend to form relationships with local people) strongly influence the extent and nature of their association with host nationals, to the point that sojourners who were more actively involved with host members were more satisfied with their sojourning experiences, and perceived the host society and its people more favourably. Within the extensive amount of empirical data supporting the importance of ties with host nationals is Zimmerman's (1995) finding that talking with American students was 'the single most important factor' in psychological adjustment to American life for a sample of international students (in Kim, 2001: 125) Furthermore, in Berry's view (1980, 1990), one of the issues sojourners

have to confront is the extent to which they form relations with the host society. Kim also offers a theory of cross-cultural adaptation, in which she explains that newly arrived sojourners over time incorporate more ties with local people into their personal networks, and as their host communication competence improves, so does their self-confidence regarding their participating in host interpersonal communication activities. Such models are thus widely acknowledged to be influential in the field of intercultural communication research as they focus on the sojourner's experiences and relationship with the host culture. So, it is possible then that the elaboration of such theories in an Asian context could further deepen the understanding of such factors of adjustment, and in particular in a study such as the present one help to understand how strong and to what extent such ties are for these sojourners, who share many cultural similarities with their hosts.

#### 2.1.4 Aspects of intercultural communication in sojourner studies

However, for a more specific context of intercultural communication between sojourners and members of the host society, Giles (1973) integrates the many aspects of communication strategies into a model of Speech Accommodation Theory. Gallois and her colleagues (1995) extended the model to 'The Communication Accommodation Theory in intercultural contexts' - which takes into consideration that 'interpersonal accommodation' (Ward, Furnham and Bochner, 2001: 63) is more likely to function at the level of specific behaviours, such as gestures, gaze and proxemics. These non-verbal codes, together with the theory's other 'dissociative behaviours' (Kim, 2001: 151) have been observed as 'contributing to the psychological barriers between interactants' (p. 151). Kim (2001) suggests that to function effectively in the new culture, sojourners must face and cope with such behaviours in intercultural communication where the 'messages of varying degrees of receptivity (that) constitute a part of the milieu...' (p. 152). For example, understanding the meaning of gestures and gazes or knowledge of unfamiliar behaviour in certain new social situations, are part of the skills required by sojourners in their new environment, and 'intercultural communication competence depends on mastering the intricacies of these processes' (Ward, Furnham and Bochner, 2001: 60). Of direct relevance are the theory's components related to non-verbal codes in the present

study, as its informants continuously theorise on the meanings of such behaviours that often frustrate their interaction and how these affect their adjustment to Singapore. Further supporting this is Lukens (1979) theory of 'communicative distance', which speaks of individuals using linguistic variants to increase or decrease the gap between the sojourners and themselves who, thus, would accordingly be seen as indifferent, intolerant or disparaging.

The above literature on the different aspects of intercultural communication, therefore, may be useful in explaining some of the communication problems there may occur in the adjustment of this study's students,

#### 2.1.5 Summary of sojourner research

The psychological and educational literature on student sojourners, therefore, is massive because of the extensive foreign student exchange programs since the 1950s. Research activities gradually moved away from the medical model of sojourner adjustment and closer to issues relating to changing values, identity and acculturation strategies (Ward, Furnham and Bochner, 2001). Subsequently, contemporary researchers put more emphasis on the systematic description and analysis of the social and psychological problems of international students, which gave theories of culture shock and intercultural adjustment a central place within the broader literature on cross-cultural transition and adjustment. Of particular relevance to this study is research on Asian student sojourners within the Asia-Pacific rim, as their adjustment is possibly influenced by culture-specific variables, such as the sojourners' cultural origins and their destinations. Therefore, PR China students, for example, on study-sojourns in Asian countries would have different adjustment experiences to those of sojourners elsewhere, and such specific research theories would help to explain what is happening in the adjustment of this study's informants. Furthermore, the culture distance and related concept, similarity-attraction, are useful theories for this study as they explain that, according to Ward (1996), sojourners have more sociocultural problems when there is a wide cultural gap between them and their host culture.

To what extent then, could such theories illuminate the present study, where the informants share many cultural similarities with local Chinese Singaporeans? The task of testing the theory in the context of these sojourners would then have to be carried out in order to understand if it can be applied in all intercultural situations.

Also interesting are intercultural communication competence theories which look at the nature and extent of host ties, and their non-verbal components (gestures, gazes and proxemics) and these will be helpful in understanding why the informants of this study continuously speak of the factors that frustrate communication with host members.

The numerous sojourner theories provide a wide theoretical base for this study, but only a few are closely linked to its specific features. The ones mentioned in the above sections seem to dominate more in terms of their applicability, and as such, are used as the guiding theories in this research on the intercultural adjustment of the sojourners.

The study not only explores the nature of sojourn and related factors that affect sojourners but also looks into some specific features of the study abroad phenomenon.

## 2.2 Study Abroad

Today the movement of students and scholars across national boundaries is a common phenomenon throughout the world. The flow of such students, along with the global economy and interdependence among nations, is reshaping educational processes as one knows them. For example, it is said that the culture international learners bring to the foreign language classroom has a deep effect on classroom processes because it is a significant factor in how teachers and students perceive language learning (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998) With such prolific movement, international students are now probably the most intensely studied group in culture contact literature. New concepts form and theories emerge, which provide useful insights into the phenomenon associated with the human affects or disposition towards living and adjusting as a student in a foreign country.

### 2.2.1 Historical perspective on China's modernizing education

Among the students as an international learner group, PR China students count as one of the largest groups to seek study abroad. A significant event in the history of education in China occurred when their centuries-old system of civil service examinations, based mainly on Chinese classical writings, was abandoned to embrace western ideas of education. In fact China became the first nation to modernize an archaic educational system quite rapidly through study abroad (Bullock, 1977). The aim of this modernization has been a driving factor in the domestic and foreign policy during most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Orleans (1988):

‘...since the 1911 Revolution, China's more progressive leaders have strived to accelerate the country's modernization by sending students abroad to acquire both knowledge and know-how’ (p. 19)

This pragmatic move appeared to embrace study abroad as a means to an end and accelerated in the 1980's through a series of conferences that concerned study abroad (Austell, Jr. 1992). The ‘three priority principles’ included selecting for study abroad people who will improve the teaching quality of higher education, training in the natural sciences as well as social sciences and language training and further training in technological sciences while giving due attention to basic science or applied technology. The emphasis then was on sending higher education and research students abroad, which actually reflected the consistency in the way China embraced educational outreach in its student exchange and study abroad policy during much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Austell, 1992).

The above reflections on the recent history of China's education provide insight into the reasons and driving force behind its study-abroad policies, which have led to the vast numbers of students going overseas for their academic sojourns. Many choose Singapore as a destination because they view it as an academic hub that not only has reputable



educational standards but also English language centres in which the language can be learned and practiced in an environment where it is the common language of daily usage.

### 2.2.2 Perception of English language proficiency

Many PR China students decide to go abroad to seek not only higher education in a chosen field of study but also English proficiency. China's increasing awareness of the importance of English as a means of commerce and communication in the 1970s led to one of the greatest developments in foreign language education of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. With the strong support for English, helped by endorsement from the leadership, some 200 million mainland Chinese are already learning English, and many go overseas to increase their language proficiency.

The impact of the 'open-door' educational policy in the 1970's had led to a tremendous awareness that English was to become a language of importance. From 1971 to 1976 many tertiary institutions resumed activity after four previous years of non-existent student enrolment, and English became the dominant foreign language taught in universities in China (Feng, 2003). It assumes a high status as it is the most widely learned and taught foreign language in the country (Lin Li, 2000). Learners, such as those in the secondary and tertiary level school-leaving population, are motivated by an awareness that English is a prerequisite for pursuing further studies in English speaking countries.

Being able to attain language competence is viewed as having the qualification to access modern technology, the potential to obtain job promotion and, as for the students in this research, academic eligibility to pursue further studies where English is used as the medium of instruction. This could be in the US, Canada, UK, Australia or Singapore. The growing numbers of students going abroad for language studies, therefore, remain undiminished till now as the wealth of the country continues to burgeon and more financially self-supporting students throng English speaking countries. Singapore is one of the destinations for such educational training because many mainland Chinese

perceive English here as the tool of business communication and the common language among its multicultural inhabitants. In Singapore, intensive English programs in many language centers attract hordes of PR China students to the country every year; these courses are aimed at improving language skills and can range from six months to lengthier sojourns.

Together with their academic interest and expectations in English-language study in Singapore, PR China students have to undergo adjustment to their new environment. Some theories of existing sojourner studies have already been reviewed in the above sections, together with a brief historical review of PR China students sojourning overseas, their perspectives of English language and the study-abroad phenomenon. The following sections cover the reasons why this research study draws upon intercultural adjustment as a theoretical approach in studying not only the problems faced by international students but also how they deal with them. The discussions will overlap with sojourner theories but they only serve to provide wider understanding of a complex process.

## 2.3 Intercultural Adjustment

### 2.3.1 Definition of terms

The term is most often discussed in connection with contact between culturally disparate individuals (Ward, Furnham and Bochner, 2001) and many researchers have attempted to understand and establish what actually occurs when individuals from different cultural backgrounds meet. As a consequence of the many theoretical accounts of contact, it has been generally agreed that such social contact is difficult, problematic and often stressful, but that most of the difficulties can be overcome, such as by giving more attention to intervention strategies that help individuals cope with the stress in unfamiliar settings or during transitions (Ward, Furnham and Bochner, 2001). Contemporary literature, therefore, has concerned itself with the skills and strategies that sojourners, or immigrants use in adjusting to changes in the new cultural milieu, and even the 'shock' part of culture shock is now discussed in terms of skills deficit (Bochner, 1986) and acculturative

stress (Berry, 1997). Nevertheless, despite the emerging theoretical sophistication in the study of intercultural adjustment, there is still considerable debate about the criteria for its assessment (Church, 1982, Mumford, 1998, Ward, 1996) and even a definition of terms is equally hard to achieve.

Many terms are used to describe this phenomenon, such as ‘international adjustment’ or ‘sojourner adjustment’ and is sometimes used interchangeably with ‘cross-cultural adjustment’ or ‘intercultural adjustment’ (Tsang, 2001). Ward (1996) prefers the term ‘acculturation’ as the ‘changes that occur as a result of continuous firsthand contact between individuals of differing cultural origins’ (p. 124).

Some concede that it is difficult to define and refer to its elusiveness as a construct, ‘The term acculturation has been used during the 20<sup>th</sup> century in reference to what may be considered one of the more elusive, albeit ubiquitous constructs in the behavioral sciences’ (Olmeda, 1979: 1961) Attempts have, however, been made to define and also clarify the differences between adjustment and adaptation, which also help the researcher understand the distinctions within the context of the study. The term adjustment is used synonymously with adaptation in a study by Ward and Kennedy (1993), who recommend that “adaptation” or “adjustment” be critically examined as an outcome of cross-cultural relocation’ (p. 222). Kim’s (1988) definition of adaptation includes a broad concept that ‘accommodates other existing meanings – subjective, objective, assimilative, acculturative and adjustive.’ (p. 39), but adjustment sometimes refers to the mental-emotional state of comfort, satisfaction, and positive attitude.

However, Ting-Toomey (1999) makes clear distinctions among adaptation, adjustment and acculturation. She describes intercultural adaptation as the ‘incremental identity-related change process of sojourners and immigrants in a new environment’ (p.235), and adjustment as the ‘short-term and medium-term adaptive process of sojourners in their overseas assignments’ (p.235), and then contrasts it with acculturation in intercultural literature, to describe a long-term process of immigrants or refugees in adapting to their new environments.

Many terms have been ‘fractionated by differing perspectives and foci’ (Kim, 2001: xi), and are used to describe what is essentially the same process undergone by sojourners in unfamiliar cultures. What are examined here, therefore, are segments of the adjustment phenomenon specific to this research and its particular interests. Kim’s (1988) definition of both adaptation and adjustment above are more appealing for this study as they are sufficiently broad and flexible that they can bring in other concepts to explain the complexities of adjustment during the analysis of the informants’ own accounts of feelings of either satisfaction or difficulties they have experienced. Even though both terms are embraced in this study, “adjustment” seems most appropriate in describing these informants’ experiences and the relatively short process they go through as strangers in a new environment.

### 2.3.2 Varying theoretical accounts of Intercultural Adjustment

Intercultural adjustment is described as the ‘degree of psychological comfort with various aspects of a host country’ (Black and Gregerson, 1991: 463). However, most researchers tend to view intercultural experiences as ‘undesirable’ (Kim, 2001), where they take the problem-based perspective of cross-cultural adjustment to be culture shock, focusing mainly on individual sojourner’s anxiety, frustration and reactions to their new environments (Anderson, 1994).

Problem-oriented work on cross-cultural adjustment has generated many studies, and Berry and his colleagues (1970-1996), for example, have emphasized an ‘acculturative stress’ in adaptation studies. Oberg (1960) first defined culture shock as the ‘anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse’ (p. 177) Since then, researchers have expanded the concept of culture shock in a variety of ways. Taft (1977) identifies a number of common reactions to cultural dislocation: cultural fatigue, sense of loss (from being uprooted from one’s familiar surroundings), rejection of members of the new society and feeling of impotence (from being unable to deal with an unfamiliar environment). According to Befus (1988), culture shock - or cross-cultural

adjustment - is 'that period of transition and adjustment during which a person experiences some degree of anxiety, confusion and disruption related to living in the new culture' (Befus, 1988: 381).

Others take the view that there is an interdependence of stress, adaptation and subsequent transformation. Adler (1987) describes the sojourn experience as a 'psychological movement from a state of low self and cultural awareness to a state of high self and cultural awareness' (p. 15). Gudykunst and Kim (2003) propose that stress is a human response whenever one's internal capabilities are challenged by the demands of the environment, and as a result, an adaptation-growth mechanism is triggered to minimize it. Kim's (2001) Stress-Adaptation-Growth model explains this dynamic in terms of those mechanisms which are fueled by a 'continual tension between stress and adaptation' and then 'resulting in a psychic growth' (Gudykunst and Kim, 2003: 381). Like Yoshikawa (1988), Kim (2001) further proposes that sojourners go through *disintegration* where stress-like feelings like bewilderment and conflict occur and thus prompt adjustment so they are able to meet and cope with the challenges.

A plethora of definitions, etiologies and even remedies for culture shock therefore exist in culture shock literature, and it is apparent that the great selection of views and cures resides in the complexity of the phenomenon itself. However, even though the very complexity of cross-cultural adjustment lends itself easily to a broad spectrum of views, approaches and remedies, none of which is invalid, it is hard to capture the experience of culture shock in all its complexity. Hullet and Witte (2001) remark that although researchers agree sojourners will experience culture shock while adjusting to their new cultures, they do not necessarily agree on a particular theory regarding the causal agents that lead to adjustment.

The limitations of models of culture shock in intercultural adjustment thus are recognized by researchers and have not been resolved because of the complex nature of adjustment and, for this study, not all their perspectives fit with the experiences of the present informants, as will be seen. Burnett and Gardner (2006), for instance, explain that the

experiences of their students fall within the acculturation model of recursive processes, which provides the most suitable model for their research but on which they could not make a firm pronouncement, and even recognize the limitations of their own research model, 'It must be recognized that any model can only offer a simplification of the individual complexities that constitute any sojourner's path of acculturation and we accept that our model inevitably suffers from this limitation.' (p. 90). Hence, the present research is also based on the assumption that a model of culture shock can only help in understanding the problems the informants go through and that they are too numerous and complex for any one model to be entirely applicable.

As for the present study, which analyses data from successive points in students' experience, it is thus useful to look at the developmental portrait of culture shock experience and, despite the fact that the early developmental models of Lysgaard (1955) and Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) did little to capture the dynamic interplay between sojourners' and host nationals' factors in the adjustment process, how it illustrates the process as 'filled with peaks and valleys' (Ting-Toomey, 1999: 252) while contributing to the holistic understanding of the cognitive, affective and identity changes in the new arrivals. Similarly, Kim's (2001) stress-adaptation-growth model, mentioned above, presents a developmental picture of adjustment, where response to culture shock is adaptation or growth that is triggered as a result of adaptive response. Yoshikawa (1988), as briefly discussed, also proposed a developmental model, and includes culture shock as one of the stages sojourners go through who end up in a *double-swing* stage where they are able to enjoy and be enriched by cultural similarities and differences, yet like Oberg's (1960) model, this one does not explain whether they go through all the stages.

In summary, a purview reveals that the main emphasis of most past and present research, and despite varying accounts of adjustment, has always been on the problematic nature of cross-cultural experience that results in problem-based theories, which generally agree that, despite the difficulty in identifying the adaptive process with precision, culture shock can be one of the most distressful life experiences (Gudykunst and Kim, 2003). In the words of Yoshikawa (1988), the stage characterized as culture shock stage is akin to a

journey on which sojourners encounter 'anomalies disturbing enough to shake their existing, customary perceptual foundations' (p. 146). As such, such accounts of culture shock and even the models of developmental culture shock in cross-cultural adjustment have helped the present study because of their ability to illuminate the experiences of the informants, and therefore enhance the understanding of what is happening.

In the next section, literature review is further refined by a focus on the multiple-related factors contained in adjustment abroad and the different conceptions of what constitute domains of cross-cultural adjustment in varying levels of comprehensiveness and foci.

### 2.3.3 Domain-specific types of adjustment

Many of the empirical studies on intercultural adjustment during the past two decades can be classified into two main streams in terms of the types of respondents: expatriate managers overseas and student sojourners overseas. The work of Torbiorn (1982), Black (1988), Black and Gregerson (1991) and Black and Stephens (1989), in particular, indicate that expatriate adjustment abroad contains multiple-related factors. In order to refine literature analysis of intercultural adjustment for this study, it is therefore important to look at literature and research that investigated those factors, how they affect adjustment and can be subsumed into domains of adjustment to explain the processes.

Black (1988) first initiated research that viewed intercultural adjustment as containing three related facets of adjustment: work, interaction and general. Further studies by Black and colleagues (1988 – 1991) confirm the three facets of intercultural adjustment, as adjustment to work, adjustment to interacting with host-country nationals and adjustment to the general environment of the host country. This model has been adapted by Parker and McEvoy (1993), who also attempt to develop their own model of adjustment by testing portions of Black's (1988) earlier model containing the three related but conceptually distinct facets of adjustment. According to them, in the intercultural setting, strangers are expected to face new challenges through living with the new environment (general living adjustment, such as housing, food, shopping, etc.) and dealing with people

from different cultures (interaction adjustment, such as adjustment to socializing and speaking with host country nationals). Such models and their relevance to this study therefore rest not only in their ability to organize salient life events and changes of the informants into categories for study but also indicate how this research relies on conceptual and empirical approaches to describe and define its own domains of adjustment.

#### Sociocultural domain of adjustment

Relatedly, the systematic program of research conducted by Ward and colleagues (Searle and Ward, 1990; Ward and Kennedy, 1992, Ward and Kennedy, 1999) proposes that intercultural adjustment is meaningfully divided into two domains: psychological and sociocultural. While the former is best understood in terms of a stress and coping framework, the latter is related to the ability to 'fit in' with the host culture, where strangers are constantly engaged in cultural learning in order to do so. Tsang (2001) proposes that it is possible to compare Black's (ibid) facets of adjustment with Ward and colleagues' (ibid) domains of intercultural adjustment, where 'it is obvious that general and interaction adjustment can be subsumed within sociocultural adaptation' (p. 4) As such, according to Tsang, general and interaction adjustments are not only subsumed into a domain but also can be best explained by Ward and colleagues' (ibid) culture learning theoretical framework where, according to Ward, Furnham and Bochner (2001), it is explained as 'the process whereby sojourners acquire culturally relevant social knowledge and skills in order to survive and thrive in their new society' (p. 51).

#### Psychological domain of adjustment

Ward and colleagues' (ibid) psychological domain of adjustment can best be understood within a stress and coping framework, where its significance to this study is in its ability to conceptualise intercultural adjustment as involving a series of stress-provoking life changes which 'tax adjustive resources and necessitate coping resources' (Ward, Furnham and Bochner, 2001: 73). General and interaction adjustment, such as Kim's



model described above, can also be subsumed into the psychological domain as, understood within its stress and coping framework, it also highlights the significance of life changes during cross-cultural transitions, the appraisal of these changes and the implementation of coping strategies to deal with them (Ward, Furnham and Bochner, 2001). Other researchers have also attempted to establish a link between life changes and stress, and Masuda, Lin and Tazuma (1982), for instance, report that there is a relationship between life changes and psychological distress. In a later study, Ward and Kennedy (1993b) found a similar relationship between life changes and mood disturbance.

### Life-changes scales

Researchers, thus, have not only acknowledged the conceptual significance of life changes for sojourners and immigrants (eg. Furnham and Bochner, 1986) but also have attempted to measure such life changes. Holmes and Rahe's (1967) Social Readjustment Rating Scale contains a selection of 43 life changes that are particularly likely to be experienced during sojourning and migration. Furnham and Bochner (1986) note that such changes are often related to living conditions, social activities, and residence. Since this study's informants raise many such examples of life changes, this framework is brought even much closer to the research. Such work also has inspired the development of the Cultural Readjustment Scale by Spradley and Phillips (1972), where 33 life changes associated with cross-cultural transitions were identified, ranging from type of food eaten, type of clothes worn, language spoken, opportunities for social contact, how much friendliness and hospitality people express, to general standards of living. Reviewing research that has produced such scales of life changes, therefore, has helped the researcher identify and relate this study's salient factors to those found in existing studies.

Studies with a sample of Chinese students in the U.S. also relate well to this study as both student samples come from the same country, and Befus (1988) proposes that there is a physiological level to cross cultural adjustment, where a sojourner's body must not only

adjust to new foods, temperatures and pathogens, but also may experience symptoms associated with psychological distress such as fatigue and headaches. Furnham and Bochner (1986) note the importance of Babiker et al's (1980) culture distance index of 10 items as a 'useful instrument' (p. 122), where some of the variables are climate, clothes, language, food, religion, leisure, and are found to relate to health problems such as anxiety and headaches. Similarly, their own 1982 study contained items within the domain of 'everyday encounters' and found that stress resulted from encounters with those items. Gaw's 2000 Personal Problem Inventory reports the percentage of students who rated its items as significant or severe problems. In Ward and Chang's (2000) study, they looked at the responses of 106 PRC student sojourners in Singapore in 12 different domains and used a cultural distance Likert scale comprised of items such as weather, language, clothing, family structure and food. Such research into the relationship between life changes and stress, however, has drawn critique from other researchers.

An early critique of the literature on negative life events (e.g. Furnham and Bochner (1986) noted that although there was a consistent relationship, the significance of life events is most likely exaggerated. Similarly, Ward, Furnham and Bochner (2001) remark that although there is a reliable link between life changes and psychological symptoms, these changes account for only a small proportion. Moreover, some of the indices and inventories above contain so many items of life changes (e.g. Holmes and Rahe's SRRS 43 items) and are so broad that they fail to provide a useful starting point, and not all items are applicable for this research. However, they are useful guides for this empirical enquiry that examine factors affecting the sojourn of these informants, and provide helpful instruments for referencing. So, while there is some critique on the significance of life changes, the awareness and description of such 'salient life events' (Ward, Furnham and Bochner, 2001: 73) are important functions of the stress and coping approach taken in inquiring into the adjustment process.

## Factors influencing the degree of adjustment

Further review of the literature suggests there are three major categories of factors influencing the degree of adjustment: individual, organization and contextual. However, since this study is related to students and their adjustment, categories such as organization or work adjustment are left out of the discussion. In the individual category, while many believe personality characteristics are important to individual success, there is little agreement as to which of the many personality characteristics is the most pertinent to study. Parker and McEvoy (ibid), for example, included self-efficacy as a personality construct— described by Bandura (1977) as ‘having the conviction that one can successfully execute the behaviour to produce outcomes’ (p.193) - in their model of intercultural adjustment, but they did not study it in their empirical work. Nicholson and Imaizumi (1993) measured self-efficacy in their study but did not investigate if it influenced the degree of adjustment. However, the construct is useful in this study to explain how individual levels of self-efficacy may influence the ability to overcome obstacles, take on challenges and cope with uncertainty. Moreover, Gudykunst and his associates (Gao and Gudykunst, 1990; Gudykunst, 1995) explain that, central to explaining individual differences, there are two psychological factors, uncertainty management and anxiety management of strangers when they enter a new environment. Tsang (2001) links self-efficacy to general and interaction adjustments in his study, and explains when strangers with high levels of self-efficacy receive feedback, whether positive or negative, from others in the new environment, it helps them ‘reduce the uncertainty of what is expected of them and how well they are performing’ (p. 8). Few researchers have studied self-efficacy in relation to the degree of adjustment, but this personality construct has helped the researcher attain a better understanding of the individual degree of adjustment and how it is linked to both domains of general and interaction adjustments in this study.

## 2.4 Methods of empirical research used on intercultural adjustment

Textbook discussions on the methods of social research are helpful, but ultimately a researcher is solely responsible for selecting and even combining methods of data collection and analysis to address set research questions. Even though research on residence and study abroad is a 'new field' (Byram and Feng, 2006: 9), methods remain similar to those of traditional quantitative or qualitative enquiry. What is essentially required in such research thus is awareness of what is used in similar current research and, accordingly, the ability to make informed decisions on what should best apply to one's own.

### Quantitative research of intercultural adjustment

This chapter cites studies on the intercultural adjustment of students studying abroad, which have been carried out by researchers who predominantly use questionnaires and other tests to quantify factors in order to create explanatory models of the phenomenon. Quantitative methods essentially involve applying measurement procedures to social life, and have been the dominant strategies for conducting social research in the past.

Among the studies which collect quantitative data, Ward and Kennedy's (1993) research instruments used a 13-page questionnaire to collect data that would assess the psychological and sociocultural adjustments of 145 Malaysian and Singaporean students in New Zealand, with items such as cross-cultural experiences, life changes, culture distance etc. Their 29-item Life Changes section was a modified version of Holmes and Rahe's (1967) Social Readjustment Rating Questionnaire that attempted to quantify the amount of readjustive stress experienced due to life changes. Also attempting to measure stress experienced during the sojourn of international students (644), Redmond and Bunyi (1993) designed their self-report instrument to collect data, adapting it from other research instruments such as Hammer, Gudykunst and Wiseman's (1978) 24-item scale and Martin's (1987) measure. Such instruments use indicators, such as "how well do you..." or "how competent do you feel..." to tap concepts, such as stress, which are then

quantitatively measured and the resulting information treated as a measure. More assessment of acculturation using quantitative methods come from research on the intercultural adjustment of 106 Chinese academic sojourners in Singapore by Leong and Ward (2000), in which their 12-page questionnaire included items of measurement ranging from perceived cultural distance to quantity and quality of host and co-national contact. A questionnaire survey was used by Tsang (2001) on 210 mainland Chinese students in Singapore, and data relating to a model of adjustment were analysed and interpreted by the statistical method of partial least squares.

The above research therefore involves large-scale samples to study the adjustment of international students and uses mostly questionnaires for data collecting and statistical methods to analyse data. Such research has strong theory testing capability, is highly structured so that the investigators can examine the precise concepts and issues of adjustment, and also can be depicted as presenting an image of social reality with an emphasis on relationships between variables. However, although they are able to inform this study through their depiction of large-scale social trends and connections between variables, qualitatively derived research would be more useful for the understanding and examining of the small-scale aspects of social reality, an example of which is interaction.

#### Qualitative methods of intercultural adjustment

Although quantitative research has been the dominant approach to social research, its influence has waned slightly since the mid-1970s, when qualitative research became increasingly popular (Bryman, 2001). As research methodologies evolved, a positive outcome was to draw attention to the dynamic nature of cross-cultural sojourn and to place an emphasis on process, which also allows the use of quite different approaches to data collection. The short-term study programmes abroad research by Tarp (2006) used a number of methods of data collection: semi-open questionnaires, diaries and semi-structured interviews, generating data that were subsequently organized and analysed through a grounded theory approach. Although the number of students is large, qualitative analysis is used to uncover the experiences of the study's respondents, and theory is

developed out of data. Lam's (2006) research on the reciprocal adjustment of 26 students applied data collection methods such as ethnographic interviews, class observations and participant observations and subsequently analysed data in order to 'unearth not only what happened, but also how, why and what it means in reality.' (p. 102).

As such, in order to present a clear picture of intercultural adjustment as a research outcome, a selection of data-collection methods is used in this study to elicit and compile relevant information for analysis. A combination of interviews, questionnaires and written work was considered the best for collecting data from the relatively small sample of 18 students from PR China, and although not all the questionnaires achieved their intended goals, sufficient data delivered those theories of adjustment that reflect their social world. The disadvantages are discussed in the following chapter in data analysis. Grounded theory is used as an approach to generate concepts, or the informants' own theories of adjustment, which to some extent would explain what constitute adjustment and the factors that promote or hinder it.

## 2.5 Conclusion

The aim of the chapter is to review much of the past and current state of knowledge about the aspects related to intercultural adjustment. Sojourners studies are reviewed and narrowed down to certain aspects relevant to this study, including descriptions of sojourners as intercultural travelers who embark on journeys to achieve a particular purpose for a limited time. Related empirical literature covers the problems of student sojourners as many researchers view them as having more difficulties than do host students, such as Furnham and Bochner (1986) who contend that students experience many types of problems during their overseas sojourn. Research formulations also emphasize the affective component of intercultural contact and draw on the stress and coping literature to account for the negative feelings arising when exposed to unfamiliar surroundings.

Moreover, work on student sojourners is closely related to culture shock, and Oberg's version of it as a phenomenon that consists of anxiety and confusion is a reasonably accurate description of what people in such circumstances actually experience (Ward, Furnham and Bochner, 2001). Going well beyond the original meaning of the term, there are other researchers who advocate that culture-shock be viewed in the broader context of transition shock, a phenomenon that leads also to profound learning, growth and self-awareness, going through adaptive changes over time (Adler, 1987). Such concepts therefore inform the present study of the basics of the phenomenon as their discussions allow the researcher to anticipate what the informants go through and this is helpful in the design and the process of empirical research.

As seen, most acculturation literature discusses the degree of cultural distance between participants and suggests that the greater the distance, the more difficult the interaction. Ward, Furnham and Bochner (2001) use the principle of culture distance, also part of the social contact theory, to account for the differences in the extent to which people experience and cope with culture shock. Kim's (2001) theory of ethnic proximity defines it as the 'degree of similarity (or difference) of the stranger's ethnicity-based characteristics relative to the corresponding characteristics predominant in the host environment' (p. 169).

The study abroad phenomenon is also reviewed and can be linked to the context of the present study. The large numbers of students from China to Singapore continues to grow, particularly when many mainland Chinese students perceive English here as the tool for business and other communications, and the common language among its multicultural inhabitants.

However, a limitation of the review lies in the fact that most of the studies in the literature on the intercultural experiences of student sojourners are conducted on students studying in North America, and focused on individuals whose cultures differ significantly from the mainstream ethos of the host country. Only a scattering of studies are undertaken in the Asia Pacific region, and useful literature sources come from Leong and

Ward (2000), Ward and Chang (2000) as well as Tsang (2001), who note that it is possible to overturn the cultural distance hypothesis due to the idiosyncratic cultural situation between the PR China and Singaporean Chinese, where there is some degree of similarity. Ward and Chang (ibid), for instance, speculate that the ethnic similarity between their group of sojourners and their hosts goes against the distinctive characteristic of cultural distance theory and ethnic proximity theory. The implication of such research for the present study gives an opportunity to the researcher to address the adjustment theory differently to traditional views that cultural similarity promotes adjustment. Moreover, the application of those Asian studies during data analysis would seem more appropriate than those conducted in settings where sojourners are culturally distant to their hosts. However, other cited studies are no less important, having relevance as the theoretical frameworks for this research as well as past and current research to provide a comprehensive view of the phenomenon of intercultural adjustment. As such, constant referencing of academic publications has also resulted in the production of varying or even competing accounts of the phenomenon, making it impossible to describe it in all its facets except what can be extracted and applied as pertinent to the particular aspects in this study.

Finally, many researchers have attempted to measure life changes by using scales and also assess intercultural adjustment by assigning domains to the different adjustments in sojourning situations. Black and Stephens (1989), for example, identify three domains or facets of sojourner adjustment: general adjustment (managing everyday activities), interaction adjustment (relating effectively with host nationals) and work adjustment (accomplishing work-related activities). Others have provided scales that identify life changes, such as the Cultural Readjustment Scale by Spradley and Phillips (1972), where 33 life changes occurring during cross-cultural transitions were identified, ranging from type of food eaten, type of clothes worn, language spoken, opportunities for social contact, how much friendliness and hospitality people express, to general standards of living. The application of such adjustment domains and referencing of those research on life changes would prove useful for this study as they help organize the various aspects



and concerns referred to in the data as well as conceptualise them to form the theories of adjustment.

Gathering data has also been carried out in the research through the use of interviews and other methods, guided partly by research on domain-type adjustments. Grounded theory analysis has provided the means to extract theories from the data through a rigorous technique of coding and constant comparison between data and conceptualizing activities. This researcher hopes to use a review of relevant literature as well as the selected mode of analysis to synthesize the present research into a coherent body of knowledge so as to illuminate the experiences of the students and reflect on the models which seem pertinent to their experiences.

## **CHAPTER 3      RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Rationale**

During the course of teaching the students in this study, it was apparent that many of them were unhappy, and the interest in their state of mind grew to the extent that it became a concrete decision to investigate this phenomenon in a formal way. Moreover, the daily contact hours and access to their points of view provided good opportunity to examine and understand their sets of concerns, not only for the aims of research and researcher but also seeing social reality through the eyes of the informants. It was exciting to see if the research questions could be answered by the data that would then have to be collected to that end.

Since the nature of the research involved having to understand verbal information from the informants, a qualitative research strategy seemed appropriate as it usually emphasizes words rather than a quantification in the collection and analysis of data (Bryman, 2001). This chapter addresses several important questions with regard to the choice of methodology:

1. Why is a qualitative method used as a design to meet the needs of the research questions?
2. What are the different devices used to conduct the research?
3. Is it necessary to use a range of methodologies to gather data?
4. How can quantitative criteria in evaluating the research be applicable to qualitative research?
5. What are, if any, alternative criteria for evaluating research?

## 3.2 A qualitative research design

### 3.2.1. Reasons for a qualitative design

It became clear that, in order to acquire data for the research, it was important to know how to elicit information through appropriate methods and what to collect. While considering the emerging problems and research questions, literature review on both kinds of analyses, the taught methodology component of the EdD, supervisory discussions and also sample size helped to determine that a qualitative approach was a more suitable method of inquiry. Relevant literature on the distinctions between qualitative and quantitative research also helped contribute to the decision. The readings revealed that most researchers have come to the same conclusion, that stipulating what qualitative research is and is not as a distinct research strategy is not straightforward at all, and the contrasts depicting the differences between quantitative and qualitative paradigms should not be viewed as hard and fast distinctions, as observed by Bryman and Burgess (1999).

Although methodology in the social sciences is divided into the two-party system where researchers can choose sides according to their preferences, this division fits badly with reality (Alasuutari, 1995). Nowadays, formulating distinctions between the two is no longer viewed as a dichotomy, or mutually exclusive models of analysis but rather as continua (Alasuutari, 1995). However, for the purpose of this research, an exclusively qualitative research is suitable because the set of concerns (homesickness, boredom, disorientation etc) which make up the phenomenon to be researched, and its intercultural aspect specifically can best be studied through this method where its strong link to phenomenology may provide answers on how the informants make sense of the world around them, and their views through their eyes.

Beyond having to explain phenomena revealed in the study, many researchers also emphasize an ‘understanding’ of the data and the world through the eyes of the people studied. The epistemological position of qualitative research stresses the “understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its

participants.” (Bryman, 2001:264). It seemed apt, in order to gain access to the informants’ thinking and hence interpret and understand their actions and their social world from their point of view, that a phenomenological approach could be deployed: “The phenomenologist views human behaviour...as a product of how people interpret the world...In order to grasp the meanings of a person’s behaviour, the phenomenologist attempts to see things from that person’s point of view” ( Bogdan and Taylor, 1975: 13-14). The empathetic understanding implied in the above is also the focus of Weber’s (1947) concept of *Verstehen* (literally meaning ‘to understand’) and many researchers claimed their investigations came from taking the views of the people they studied as the point of departure. This tendency reveals itself in frequent references to empathy (*Einfühlung*, in German) and seeing through others’ eyes. Droysen (1858) was the first to introduce a methodological dichotomy between explaining and understanding, and others such as Von Wright (1971) posited that understanding has a psychological ring which explanation has not. This psychological feature was most forcefully emphasized by Simmel (1918) in Von Wright (1971: 11) who believed that understanding is the “recreation in the mind of the scholar of the mental atmosphere the thoughts and feelings and motivations, of the objects of his study.” By a qualitative methodology, the understanding of the feelings, thoughts and words of the informants can be developed and included as representative of an analysis of this specific segment of society.

In conclusion, it can be said that an explanation of the phenomenon of adjustment in this study through a quantitative approach would not adequately answer the research questions, that continue to develop and be refined as research progresses. Hence, seeking to understand, or using the *Verstehen* approach, would allow the researcher to be empathetic to the informants’ behaviour and action, and also interpret their actions and their social world from their point of view, which is also a feature emphasized in phenomenology. Many social scientists write about the similarity in the writings of the hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition and the *Verstehen* approach, and emphasize social action as being meaningful to actors and therefore needing to be interpreted from their point of view (Bryman, 2001). This approach, thus, together with mainly qualitative

data collection and analysis methods, hereafter “qualitative approach”, is used and forms the basis for understanding the phenomenon in this study.

### 3.2.2 The key informants

The sample size was small and limited to a total of eighteen students from PR China. They had just begun a new semester at the language centre, in which the study was conducted and this researcher is employed as a teacher, that has long been offering language learning programmes to PR China students. The aim of most of the students who have enrolled in the programme was to achieve a completion certification as well as the TOEFL test; most of them hoped to be accepted into tertiary academic institutions in Singapore or overseas. The duration of their academic sojourn in Singapore ranged from six months to a year and this varied from student to student as it depended on the entry-point level of ability at which students began their coursework. This particular cohort was selected because the students had begun the programme at the same time having just arrived in Singapore two weeks before, boarded in separate households on the island and put into different class levels at the Centre, after a pre-course placement test that matched their language skills. The students in this research-cohort had intermediate to advanced ability in all four language skills and their ages ranged from 18 to 20 years. Altogether, they have had the requisite six years of foundation English language at school in China, and their grasp of English syntax was typically strong, their speaking skills fell short of the standard of fluency enjoyed by most of their counterparts in Singapore. More importantly, this group of students had begun to show varying degrees of difficulty in adjusting to life in Singapore, more culturally and socially than academically.

The entire research is conducted in English and is, by the researcher’s choice, the medium through which the interview-questions and questionnaires are asked and answered. Becker and Geer (1957a) argue that in order to understand a culture, the language must be learned (by the researcher), including both formal language and the *argot*-special uses of words and slangs that are important to grasp meanings in culture. While this may imply that a researcher conduct his/ her study in the participants’

language to fully understand the nuances and subtleties in language and this is true to a large extent, it was felt that the integrity of the research data would not have been compromised if the interviews and other data were obtained in English, and as their language teacher, the researcher felt that their language skills were sufficient to provide both verbal and written responses. Moreover, both researcher and participants in this study share similar cultural elements, such as race and a common language, which often helped to clarify meanings and provide insight into a choice of word, for example.

As the students would be at a disadvantage in having to express their feelings and reflections in a foreign language, it was up to the researcher to show attentiveness and sensitivity to meanings, and also observe behaviour that reinforced their words in interviews. The research also included participant observation where, according to Bryman (2001), the participant observer's contact with the participants allows the 'implicit features...to be revealed as a result of the observer's continued presence and because of the ability to observe behaviour rather than just rely on what is said' (p. 328). Observation of their behaviour therefore helped to reinforce their accounts and helped this researcher be aware of these behaviours within the context of their culture. As they are all from China, it was important to understand not only what was said but also the way they broached topics related to their adjustment (e.g. why they find the culture of Singaporean food so different despite pre-conceived notions of similarities), by seeing it through their eyes.

Moreover, participation in English would also encourage them to engage in all four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. For example, as interviews depend primarily on verbal behaviour, the students would therefore actively use them to practice listening and speaking in contexts that are different to their classroom syllabi, such activities they seemed to greet with enthusiasm and anticipation.

Furthermore, these informants, for whom the topic of adjustment was relevant were logically appropriate participants. Although the sample consisted of only eighteen students and the findings may raise questions of generalisability, sometimes, certain

topics do not require many other participants as such topics would not be interesting to them (Bryman, 2001), as in this case. Moreover, the researcher had not noticed that topics pertaining to adjustment had visibly concerned students in other classes. Although researching phenomena often involves or even requires a wide range of people, this group was selected as it had been possible to organize them in terms of certain stratifying criteria such as age, cultural background, educational background, length of stay (three to four weeks) in Singapore, duration of academic sojourn (eight months) and more importantly, interest in their adjustment to their new lives. However, one has to admit that, in the interest of a generalisable research finding, since only one group of eighteen informants was sampled, it is difficult to establish any systematic variation in the ways many groups of students may perhaps have thought differently about adjustment to life in Singapore. Nevertheless, one group was then sampled as the informants were homogeneous in the essential characteristics (age, cultural background, educational background, interest in their adjustment etc.), and they also shared similar characteristics and backgrounds with the rest of the students in the entire school.

Theoretically, and as explained above in section 3.2.1, a qualitative approach was appropriate since the study aimed to probe into the student's inner world and the complexities that abound in their interacting with their new learning and cultural new environment. It allows the researcher to draw on their reflections and reveal the processes of learning through which the informants pass and whose processes may inform on how their strategies may contribute to their adjustment.

The next section deals with one of the different methods of data collection, followed by other methods in subsequent sections, and help to clarify the processes of data collection.

### 3.3 Ethnographic approach

Ethnography plays an important part in the study as it entails an extended involvement in the academic and, to a lesser extent, social life of these informants. Also, it somehow defines the position of an observer who could also gather data in a number of other ways, as it is eclectic in its use of data collection and analysis procedures (Lecompte & Preissle

with Tesch, 1993) and, although much of the data collection involved interviewing, participant observation was necessarily included as part of the methodology so that the researcher could develop an understanding of the culture of the group and its members, and their behaviour within the context of that culture; ethnography allows the researcher to examine “social and cultural patterns and meaning in communities” (Schensul, Schensul & Lecompte, 1991: 19).

A certain amount of participant observation provided opportunity that allowed a gradual infiltration into the lives of the informants, where it is possible they are sensitive to ‘outsiders’. A teacher and a researcher would be considered an outsider, as most PRC students regard and isolate their teachers as unapproachable beings who have ‘... authority, even superiority...’ (Jin and Cortazzi, 1998:104), and therefore could remain reserved or unobliging during interviews. However, the genuine interest in their problems and day-to-day lives that came naturally from participating and observing over time allowed the researcher to gain access to certain areas, such as resistance to learning about and adapting to those whom they considered as unhelpful to their adjustment, as well as their enthusiasm at times to adopt ways to adjust to their new environment.

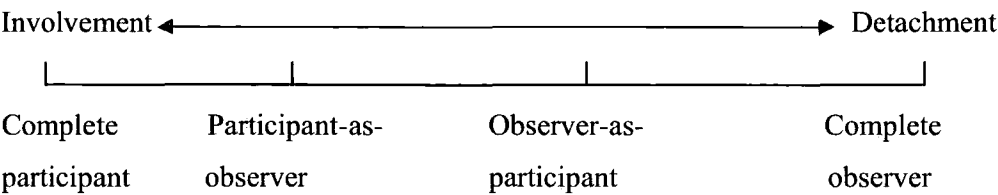
It is important, however, to define the specific role the researcher took on in this ethnographic method, because it was not a strictly participative role. Frequently, it was one that Gold (1958) referred to, in his classification, as the role of an observer-as-participant. At times, there was more observation, especially during periods between interviewing, and the researcher was often only semi-involved in part observation and part field note-taking. Ethnographer roles, according to Gold, also allow a large amount of flexibility in that they can be arrayed on a continuum of degrees of involvement with and detachment from members of the group being researched. Switching from role to role on this continuum is also discussed and simplified by Gan (1968) whose classification ranges from total participation, researcher-participant to total researcher. Like Gold’s classification, it reflects degrees of involvement and distance, but has an advantage in that it deals with overt observation and researchers do not typically have to take on a



single role through their study. While the two go hand in hand, much of the data in participant observation also came from the interviews and questionnaires.

As one of the ESL teachers, this researcher had immediate and regular access to the informants, which permitted immersing into the group for a period of six months, observing behaviour and listening to what was said among the particular informants. This access to their world went beyond mere participant observation on many occasions although, at times, just observation was more appropriate. It should be noted here that when observation took place, the approach was neither overt nor covert but more introspective, which involved writing some field notes in a social setting where the participation was both researcher and observer. Moreover, although not the case here, it is interesting to note that some researchers, such as Bulmer (1982), have taken the stance that even ‘disguised observation ... may be acceptable’ (in Bryman, 2001: 478), and even a universalist like Erickson (1967: 372) recognizes that it ‘would be absurd ... to insist as a point of ethics that sociologists should always introduce themselves as investigators everywhere they go and should inform every person who figures in their thinking exactly what their research is all about.’

In this closed non-public setting, access was mostly facilitated by being their teacher, conducting both class observation as well as participant observation accompanied by interviews on a regular basis; the role as researcher could be said to be part of the position in the organization. Gold’s (1958) classification of participant observer roles, arranged on a continuum of degrees of involvement with informants has four roles:



**Fig. 3.1** Gold’s classification of participant observer roles

The role according to the classification moved between participant as observer and observer as participant and did not restrict the researcher to adopting a single role during the study, which could have been inflexible.

As this research adopts a general approach of beginning with general research questions, the task was then to orientate the observations to focus on specific situations so that relevant data could be collected. However, it was important, despite the research focus, that flexibility be used as it is a strength of qualitative research strategy (Bryman, 2001).

The next section discusses some aspects that were considered during data collection.

#### Aspects of data collection

Field Notes: Most of the notes comprised of jotted and full field notes, dated and organized into several categories. As indicated below in Context, all field notes were taken in two locations: In school, in-class and after-class, where 20% of the notes were taken during lessons, and the rest were taken in focus-group interviews; and out-of-school: park, eating places, public transport vehicles and a local tertiary institution.

The notes from both locations as well as transcripts from interviews would make up the full data source. Some aspects of the note-taking were about:

- the setting: busy/quiet, many/few people in the vicinity, new/old building
- where the interview took place: in school/out-of-school, the weather (if outdoors)
- how the interview went: the mood of the students, talkative/reserved, cooperative/resistant, nervous/relaxed, etc.
- any other feelings about the interview: how certain new avenues of interest opened up

Although the notes are not coded, they acted as reminders and often assisted during the coding of the data that came from the interviews, questionnaires and written accounts,

which entailed reading through answers and deriving themes that can be sorted into codes.

Taking field-notes, therefore, basically helped in two areas, (a) to decide on the content of the interviews, and (b) to contextualize the interviews and explain non-verbal aspects of them.

Time: Hammersley and Atkinson said (1995) that time has to be mentioned in the context of the informants. On two occasions, interviewing was held during the weekend and not on school premises, where the informants were fairly relaxed and unpressured by school work.

Context: The two relevant contexts were school and out-of-school locations. Such observations took place in a park, a food outlet, on a bus, a local tertiary institution. Notes were taken during the excursions as well as during two planned out-of-school focus group interviews. This helped the researcher see how they interacted in a variety of locations so as to understand their adjustment and the factors, cultural or social, that promoted or hindered it.

An ethnographic role in this study, therefore, involved taking the above aspects into consideration, where field-notes, among other uses, prompted memory, and time and context were practical factors that affected data collection.

The next section discusses ethical principles in research, especially those issues that arise in relations between this researcher and the research participants, and those that most likely impinge upon this study's informants.

#### Ethical issues

The ethical issues in this research are informed and guided by standard ethical principles in social research. According to Diener and Crandall (1978) there are four main areas which, although overlapping with one another, form a useful classification of ethical

principles in and for social research in general, and they are: if there is harm to the participants; if there is a lack of informed consent; if there is an invasion of privacy; if deception is involved.

Measures were taken to ensure that the four areas were carefully observed in this study where, not only were the informants aware there was an ongoing study during which frequent formal and non-formal regular interaction with them indicated a research situation, but they also agreed to the scheduled meetings, such as interviews (focus-group and small-group interviews), that were a part of the ethnographic work. With regard to the first area, the Social Research Association (SRA) *Ethical Guidelines* advocates that the social researcher 'should try to minimize disturbance both to subjects themselves and to the subjects' relationships with their environment' (in Bryman, 2001:480); in this case, the researcher had ensured that all interviews and other meetings accommodated the schedule of all the informants and did not interrupt classes. With regard to the second area, this study follows the principle that, even when people know they are being asked to participate in research, they are fully informed about the process, and also the guidelines suggested by SRA, that inquiries should be based on the freely given consent of the informants. With regard to the third area, this study follows the British Sociological Association (BSA), *Statement of Ethical Practice* guideline, where the anonymity and privacy of those who participate in the research process are respected; therefore, personal information concerning the research informants, in particular student names, are kept confidential. In the last area, Bryman (ibid) explains that deception occurs when researchers represent their research as something other than what it is; in this study, the students were informed of the goal (thesis work) and processes (methods of data collection) in the research and were willing to participate as informants. As the SRA *Guidelines* put it, 'It remains the duty of social researchers... not to pursue methods of inquiry that are likely to infringe human values and sensibilities' (in Bryman, ibid: 484) which, in doing so would endanger the mutual trust between this researcher and the informants. As such, ethical concerns that might arise in the context of collecting and analyzing data were addressed so that relations between researcher and research informants are not breached, and that standard guidelines are followed.

The ethnographic approach, therefore, entails being aware of the ethical principles involved in social research, especially those that arise in relations between researcher and research participants, where there is some involvement in the academic and, to a lesser extent, social life of these informants.

While an immersion in the relevant aspects of the informants' lives would seem to make a researcher better equipped to see as they see, it is likely that there is a wide range of issues that are not amenable to observation alone, so that asking the students about them represents the only viable means of finding out about them within a qualitative research strategy. Observing the behavioural language of the students can be only a part of the study and issues can be teased out more effectively by interviewing methods.

### 3.4 The interview method

The interview is aptly defined as a form of discourse between two or more speakers or as a "linguistic event in which the meanings of questions and responses are contextually grounded and jointly constructed by interviewer and respondent" (Schwandt, 1997: 79). Its use to acquire relevant information is so pervasive today that it has been said that people live in an 'interview society' (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997; Silverman, 1993). Moreover, ethnography as a research approach involves not only a large amount of time spent on participant observation but also the use of the interview as a means to collecting qualitative data, followed by transcription and analysis of transcriptions.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) remarked that almost all interviews, regardless of their purposes, seek to encompass the *hows* of people's lives as well as the traditional *whats* (Dingwall, 1997; Gubrium and Holstein, 1997; Holstein and Gubrium, 1995; Kvale, 1996; Sarup, 1996; Seidman, 1991; Silverman, 1993, 1997a). This allows therefore both interviewers and interviewees to discuss how they have reached their opinions and views of the world in which they live, and their interpretations of that world.

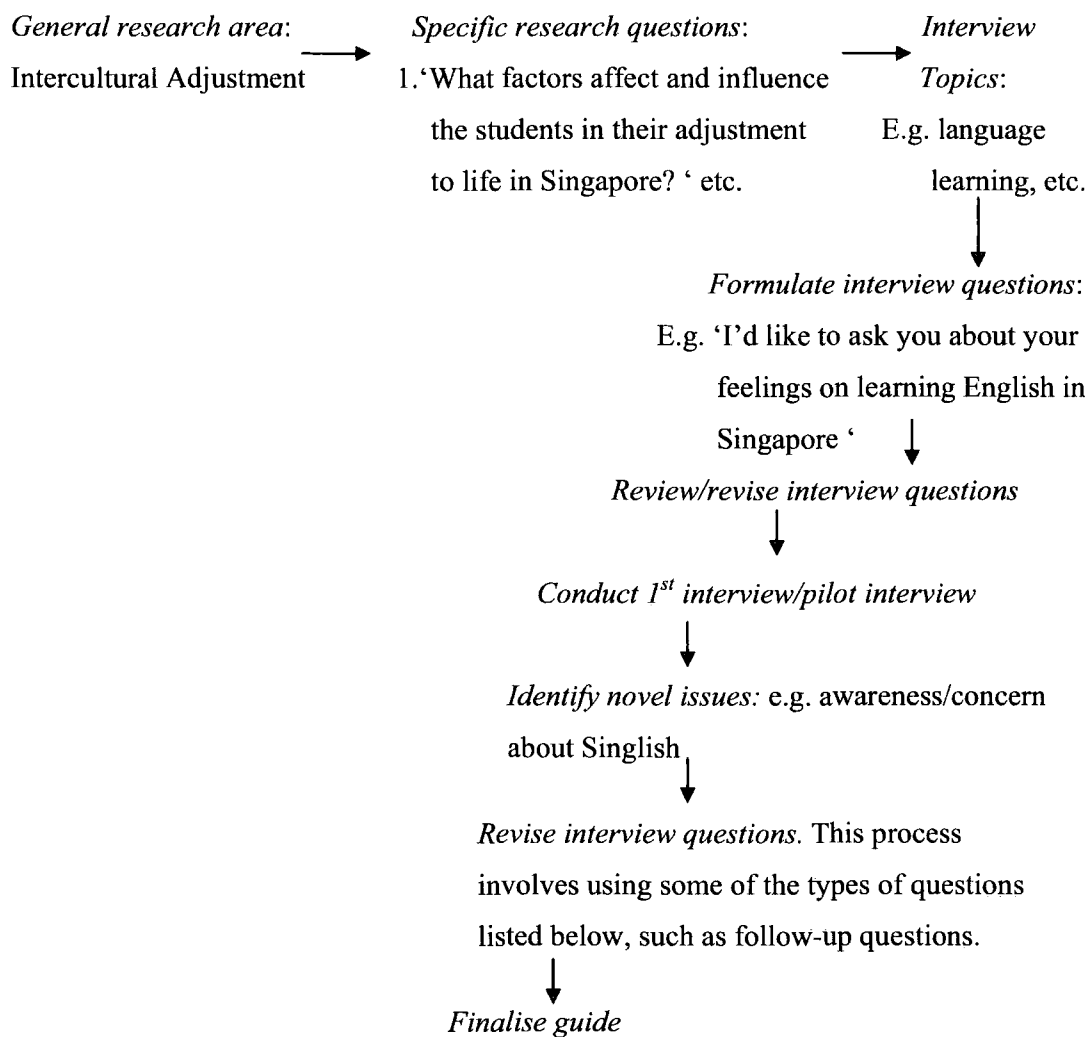
Clearly, the aim of interviews is to create a discourse that allows both parties to explore the questions and responses involved and also the interviewer to gather and collect data relevant to her research. These interactional encounters and the nature of the social dynamic of the interview will then shape the nature of the knowledge generated (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). In this sense, the interview participants are “actively” constructing knowledge around questions and responses (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995), as mentioned above by Schwandt (1997).

#### 3.4.1. The qualitative interview

There are about 12 major types of interviews and the one that most concerns this research is the qualitative interview. For some writers, such as Mason (1996), this term denotes an unstructured interview; however, it is a general term that embraces interviews of both the semi-structured and unstructured kind (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). It can be regarded as the most suited to this research on learning about the adjustment of the Chinese students as the interest necessarily lies in their points of views and their insights into what they see as relevant and important.

Open questions are used in this research because the students could answer in their own terms as opposed to those that are fixed by closed questions. This allows also unusual answers to be derived, as this study has shown. Moreover, as the questions do not suggest fixed alternative answers to the informants, their levels and breadth of knowledge and understanding of issues could be tapped. Whatever was salient to them could also be explored where the replies were richer in details.

In preparing an interview guide, certain steps were taken to formulate the questions. The plan below, adapted from Bryman’s (2001) Interview Guide, shows how this study’s guide was devised and questions formulated:



**Fig. 3.2** Interview Guide

### Types of Questions

The questions asked in qualitative interviews are variable, and Kvale (1996) identified nine different types of questions:

Introducing questions: In the interviews, some of the introducing questions were usually divided into two categories, their learning English in Singapore and their feelings on living in Singapore

*Learning English in Singapore*

‘ I’d like to ask you about your feelings on learning English in Singapore.’

*Living in Singapore*

‘ How did you feel about being in Singapore when you first arrived here?’

Follow-up questions: These required the interviewees to elaborate his/ her answers, ‘ Can you say some more about how the weather in Singapore makes you unhappy here?’

Probing questions: This entails following up what has been said through direct questioning, ‘Do you think having more Singaporean friends helps you to adjust to living here?’

Specifying questions: This involves asking specific questions, ‘ What did you do when your host family ignored you?’

Direct questions: Such questions could be left to the end so as not to influence the direction of the interview. Such questions were, ‘Are you happy with the way you have adapted to living here?’

Indirect questions: In order to get their views, certain questions can be indirect, ‘ What do most of your class mates think of the ways that most PRC students are regarded in Singapore?’

Structuring questions: This helps to organize and direct the interview, ‘ I would like to move on to the topic of differences between the Chinese in China and the Chinese in Singapore.’



Interpreting questions: Such questions are usually aimed at clarifying previous answers given by the informants, ‘ Do you mean that the differences (between the Chinese in either country) make you homesick and unhappy here?’

The latitude of a qualitative interview also allows a researcher to depart significantly from a schedule or guide being used, and even to ask questions that lead from replies and can vary in order and even wording of the questions (Bryman, 2001), as in this study. This flexible method therefore enabled at times responding to be made according to the direction in which the interviewees take the interview; this resulted, on occasions, in making an adjustment in the emphasis of the interview topic as a result of significant issues (additional or complementary) that emerged during the interview and that eventually formed an integral part of the study’s findings, a practice that is predicted by Beardsworth and Keil, (1992). The qualitative interview also yields rich and more detailed answers, especially when multiple interviews can be made to obtain the data needed to answer research questions.

#### 3.4.2 The unstructured and the semi-structured interview

In the six months of research during the informants’ attendance at the school, semi-structured interviewing was the preferred method. Also, at times, there was concern that the use of even the most rudimentary interview guide would not allow genuine access to their views, especially when the encounters took place outside the school’s formal setting. The unstructured interview style was used during those times when the informant group met outside the school’s premises where discussion occasionally diversified in scope to cover a wide range of topics of the students’ lives: their relationship to study, their relationships with friends and the people who are involved in their daily routine, their hopes, fears for the near future and their impressions of social life beyond and after school. These were relevant because they helped throw light during the search for answers as to whether they had adjusted to life in Singapore as students, how much or little they had adjusted and what they thought about the environment in which they lived that helped or inhibited the adjustment. Such discussions can be said to constitute

unstructured interviews, as they (the interviews) tend to be very similar to conversation (Burgess, 1984).

It can be said, therefore, that certain types of interviewing are better suited to particular kinds of situations and a researcher must be aware of the implications, pitfalls and problems that may arise from the types of interviews he/she selects (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Having said this, the most suitable for this research is still the semi-structured interview because it allows a list of questions and fairly specific topics to be covered, called the *interview guide*, (Bryman, 2001) and the interviewees also had leeway to deal with the questions. Leidner (1993: 238) describes the interviewing style in her research to involve a degree of structure and also “allowed room to pursue topics of particular interest to the workers”.

The use of both unstructured and semi-structured interviewing methods at intermittent times during the research was not only useful in helping the researcher gather a great breadth of data but also obtain an understanding of the informants’ world. Furthermore, it is also important to note that, in order to elicit and gather a wide variety of differing views in relation to particular aspects of adjustment, the interviews were done in groups, and the term commonly used in sociological research is the *focus interview* or the *focus group*, which method essentially relies on the systematic questioning of several individuals simultaneously in a formal or informal setting. The following section discusses this method and also the reasons the researcher conducted focus-group interviews instead of individual interviews, where individual informants may not want to respond to certain issues on their own or even have thought of them..

### 3.4.3 The focus-group interview

Merton, Fiske and Kendall (1956) coined the term *focus group* to apply to a situation where the researcher asks more than one interviewee very specific questions about a topic after having done a lot of research. Today, most group interviews are generically called focus group interviews even though there are considerable variations in the natures and

types of group interviews (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Furthermore, the focus group has become a popular method for researchers examining ways in which people in conjunction with others interpret and construe the topics in which the researcher is interested.

For the purpose of this research the focus group technique is employed because it includes a variety of distinct functions. Through this type of interview, the informants were given more autonomy or opportunity to probe each other's reasons for holding certain views; a one-to-one interview offers no such opportunity. As such, the possibilities in such an interview can realistically include the elicitation of a wide variety of different viewpoints with regard to a certain issue. Moreover, in focus groups, the researcher has to relinquish some of the control to the group, which allows important topics that concern them all to be brought to the fore. This is significant in the context of qualitative research as the views of the interviewees are an important point of departure (Bryman, 2001). Another function is that interviewees are able to respond to each other during the interview and therefore are able to challenge views if there is dissension. This is in itself very useful because it may present more realistic accounts of what the informants think and possibly compel them to reconsider or even revise their opinions. Lastly, interviewees are given the chance to collectively make sense of a phenomenon, and in this research, the students were able to see that, among themselves, many of them held similar views on why they were or were not adjusting to life in Singapore.

Individual interviews were not conducted during the course of data collecting as it was felt that focus-group answers would provide more interesting data for researching the adjustment phenomenon, whereas the question-and-answer approach of interviewing individual informants may generate sometimes predictable responses. However, some individual interviews did take place, but only to query, explain or even confirm what the had said previously in the group interviews. Such interviews usually lasted about ten to fifteen minutes where certain points were brought up again, e.g. what the informant had meant by sunlight disorientation. No new topics were brought up in these *individual interviews* as they would be introduced in planned group interviews where the entire group of informants could participate and contribute their thoughts and ideas.

## The size

At first, although all the informants enthusiastic and agreed to participate in the research, it was not known they would be diffident about talking freely about their adjustment in a research context, even though half the group were always chatty when they talked about it or related topics, even before formal data gathering started. Eventually, eighteen PR China students from the class agreed to participate in the study. In spite of some initial apprehension of the reservedness, the researcher felt that it was likely that this group would have a lot to say on the research topic as they became very involved in and emotionally preoccupied with the different facets of adjustment to life in Singapore. In order to unearth that kind of information, it was important to glean the informants' personal accounts, which would have been easier to do than in larger group where it may have been difficult to stimulate discussion.

The duration of their sojourn ranged from six months to a year. Although this particular group of students entered Singapore at slightly different times (a week at the most among the students), they all started their academic semester at the same time. In this sense, they were selected as it is likely that all the informants, to a large extent, share the kinds and range of views that are affected by the homogeneity of their circumstances, their age, class (social and financial status), academic goals and so on, and are already well embedded in similar routines of living, studying, communicating and carrying out after-school activities. This may in fact lead to, if individual interviewing is conducted, each interview consisting of comments and patterns being repeated and eventually little new material is generated, similar to theoretical saturation where the major analytic categories are saturated. The focus group approach, however, offers the opportunity of allowing the informants to probe each other's reasons for certain views.

Therefore, the size of this group depended on their willingness to express their feelings and thoughts on their adjustment, thereby making themselves good candidates as informants for this research. They had already confided in the researcher many times, even before research started, the diverse feelings on several aspects of their lives, e.g.

some would say they liked the scenery and how fast they were able to adjust to Singapore, while others disliked the food and climate and could not adjust. In spite of the diversity of feelings and views, all eighteen informants shared a common element, that the topic is relevant to them and they were willing to share these feelings by participating in research.

Researchers such as Kitzinger (1994) and Hobrook and Jackson (1996), claim that having informants who belong as members of a pre-existing group help bring out the naturalness in discussions, and can be a highly appropriate strategy for selecting a research sample. In this case, the informants were all students from a Speaking Class and are already familiar with one another as classmates. During the interviews (five interviews; see below or Appendix 1 for a timeline), the students obviously got on fairly well and did not behave with inhibition. They usually listened to others' responses and would elaborate or modify views on the extent to which they have adjusted to certain aspects of Singapore. Furthermore, a few would voice agreement, which they would not do as individuals, or give thought towards some issues that would not have been thought of without the opportunity of hearing others' views. Even though there was occasional dissent, especially with regard to the extent of contact with their hosts, the 'arguing' challenged each other's views, which denotes that this researcher had a chance of getting more realistic accounts of what the China students think as they are compelled to think about and even probably revise their own opinions or the extent of their adjustment. The behaviour and answers of the informants, therefore, indicated that focus-group interaction was helpful in eliciting a broad variety of different views in relation to certain aspects, as will be explained in the next chapter.

Appendix 1 shows a timeline of data gathering, and includes an interview schedule. Five interviews were conducted over eight months. Also in the following are brief discussions on how the interviews took place as well as some concluding remarks that are based on the interview data as well as notes taken during their observation. These concluding remarks are introduced here in advance of the sections on data analysis because they may

give an inkling of how the interviews were conducted, their aims and whether they achieved them:

1<sup>st</sup> Interview (60 minutes): 20<sup>th</sup> April, 2001:

The first interview consisted of all 18 informants and it was apparent that, after four weeks of attending classes together, they were already familiar with one another. Questions were general and pertained to their views about school, social life outside the school and interaction with others. (See Appendix 4 for the Interview Question Schedule). This interview yielded the most data as the informants were excited, talkative and enthusiastic about giving their views.

The Cultural shock Questionnaire given out on the 27<sup>th</sup> April but it was not used in the analysis, as was indicated and explained in detail in section 3.5. Mumford's (1998) Cultural Shock Questionnaire was first administered to British workers who had traveled to different countries, and was devised to measure their culture shock. The questions Mumford had devised seemed appropriate and apt for a study of culture shock, e.g. Question 1 in The Culture Shock Questionnaire, 'Do you feel strain from the effort to adapt to a new culture?', however, it aimed more to see if culture shock occurs or not, instead of probing the views, feelings and even reasons from this study's informants on their adjustment to a new culture. Moreover, the questionnaire's multiple-choice answers were limited (a 3-point scale) and limiting, the researcher felt that the reasons behind those answers would have been more revealing and informative for the study. Therefore, this questionnaire was not useful for the study.

2<sup>nd</sup> Interview (75 minutes): 18<sup>th</sup> May, 2001

The second interview consisted of 16 students and some of the topics and questions not covered in the first interview were reintroduced here. Although the topics pertaining to adjustment to school, life outside school and interaction with others were not new, there was a diversity of answers following a high degree of interaction. In this interview, there was an emphasis on some tightly defined topics: their adversity to local food, the weather and lack of interaction in English. During this interview, there was an opportunity to gain a deeper insight into their feelings as the intended accent was on how they made sense of

the causation of adjustment, or lack of it, to which they responded accordingly. There was also a tighter consensus on those topics with the informants showing a consensual construction of meaning, e.g adjustment to their new life means adjustment to the weather in their new environment (see Section 4.1, Statement number 15, 'I didn't adjust because it's very hot and small' (S. 14/M)). The discussions in this session thus demonstrated broad agreement among them concerning those issues, with each informant building on the preceding remark. It seemed that they all have had more or less similar experiences in adjusting to the same factors.

The General Background questionnaire (Appendix 3) was administered in this session. Section A section consists of areas related to their educational and family backgrounds. Section B consists of questions related to pre-departure knowledge and feelings, and section C has questions related to the use of English outside the school and how much they interact in English with each other and those outside the school. This questionnaire proved to be more useful than the Culture Shock questionnaire and provided written validation, to some extent, on verbal remarks made during focus-group discussions.

3<sup>rd</sup> Interview (45 minutes): 6<sup>th</sup> July

The third interview consisted of 15 informants and was shorter than the first two interviews. Some new aspects were revealed in this interview with four informants raising points about their disappointment in how little progress they had made in their speaking skills, which they wanted to improve by having more interaction with locals. The dynamics during discussion was hampered by the four informants leading the topic for most of the duration, and although it would be up to the researcher to intervene and guide the interview more closely, they were allowed to continue expressing those feelings and views that were not only revealing but also had relevance for the research questions. Variation in theories of adjustment was more apparent in this interview, and although the rest of the informants were not very expressive, the lack of agreement and reaction from them revealed their stances on such issues.

4<sup>th</sup> Interview(60 minutes): 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2001

This interview consisted of 16 informants. There were the usual six reticent informants and by this session, they already have been identified and therefore actively encouraged to speak more. An emerging group view on the factors that impinged on their adjustment was more prominent, namely, food, weather, accommodations, locals, and interaction. The pattern of agreement and disagreement to those intervening factors as promoting and hindering to adjustment, as seen and heard among the informants, could now be firmly established. Although the researcher could have played a stronger role in exploring with the informants the factors that lie behind the differences of opinion, they were not examined as it was felt that asking for their reasons would have been intrusive during the interviewing and even too interruptive. The goal was to allow a fairly free rein to the discussions. The variation to adjustment, therefore cannot be fully explained but a discussion that personality is linked to the variation in adjustment is provided in detail in section 4.7.3 and again in section 5.4

5<sup>th</sup> Interview (65 minutes): 2<sup>nd</sup> November, 2001

This interview consisted of 17 informants. This final interview summarises their views on their adjustment over eight months and establishes their theories of adjustment. Even in this final interview, general questions were used to guide the discussion while allowing some latitude,

‘ What do you think about your stay in Singapore so far, and about such factors as the food, weather, interaction with locals? Are there other factors?

The debate on whether adjustment had occurred for some of the informants continued in this session, but what is more important that they have expressed and revealed a whole range of factors and still considered the significance of those factors as affecting their adjustment. Although the variation in adjustment among the informants would probably go on and very likely beyond the duration of this research, their participation and the discussions the interviews had stimulated had allowed them to think more about the reasons why they held the views that they did and perhaps to even revise those opinions, which had happened on a two occasions in this session (on locals and food). As mentioned above, the posing of questions and agreement and disagreement on whether



they had adjusted to their new lives helped to bring out their own stances on this issue. Moreover, even though there was no resolution of disagreements, it also helped to compel the informants to express the grounds (or reasons) on which they held their particular views.

In conclusion, the focus-group interviews in the research were undertaken within the traditions of qualitative research. The group participants viewed the issues with which they are confronted as members of that group rather than as individuals, where social phenomenon is not viewed in isolation of one another but the 'coming to terms' (Bryman, 2001) or the understanding of their adjustment is undertaken in interaction and discussion. In other words, this researcher's role was to listen to how they responded to each other's views and built them up out of the ongoing interaction that took place within the group. In this sense, such group interviews demonstrate how the meaning of adjustment, in its many aspects, is construed by the China students in their everyday life in their host country, and by this regard can be regarded as more realistic and representative than individual interviews. (See Appendix 4: Group interviews, for two examples, Excerpt A and B)

#### 3.4.4 Role of teacher-confidante-researcher

The roles of teacher, confidante and researcher often merged in many ways during this research and may not be amenable to clear-cut defining nor how all three can be arrayed on a scale ranging from the extent of involvement with (as confidante/teacher) to distance from the informants (as researcher).

As their teacher, the role is more distinct as it is defined by pedagogic and class activities. However, there is, to some extent, observation of their behaviour in this role, although being teacher-researcher/observer is invariably constrained by aspects such as locality, as being in the classroom alone does not reflect their adjustment as a whole. Moreover, before research and data gathering started, the involvement, albeit as teacher, in a part of their social setting had already begun, to the extent that individual students themselves

felt comfortable, from time to time, to *confide* in their teacher their views on life in Singapore and coping with adjusting to its many aspects. The advantage of being in dual roles during research allowed an unobtrusive *infiltration* into their student lives that gradually led to gaining access to areas such as patterns of resistance or adjustment to learning, or to individual or groups of students who support or reject the idea that study abroad in their present environment has been a good experience.

Observation as part of the research process was also an ongoing process whether it was time to collect data or not, and as such, copious notes were taken based on these observations. They contain fairly detailed summaries of events and the behaviour of the informants and some initial reflections on them. In this sense, referencing those notes became an integral part of research. Below is an example of scratch notes taken after hearing remarks made by a student and observing the event where another informant joined her before class began;

‘April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2001: I should have taken notes earlier, when Student 3 (name) began complaining about the spicy food; she’s not used to it. Now, I try to make rough notes and jottings of some sort based on observations whenever I can. Asked her if she minds note taking; explained again I’m doing research. But don’t want to seem obvious. Will ask next time if all mind note-taking.

Today, we have 5 minutes before class; no prompting from me! She is joined by her friend, student 9 (name). They both say food is too spicy, and most Singaporeans like hot food. In China (seems to be constant comparison) they are not ‘accustomed’ (her word) to spicy food. Her friend just called home to tell parents he doesn’t like it here; wants to leave ( I reflect question: only after 3 weeks?). He says not just the food, weather, people. Let’s see if he changes views later.’

[ Scratch notes made before interview session, scheduled for after classes]

The informants did not mind notes being taken and were well aware they would be used for research. They continued to chat animatedly with one another about food and what

they had eaten the night before. As their teacher, therefore, there was easy access to such events where revealing and naturalistic discussions could be observed and noted. With a notepad and pen in hand during most of such events, outside formal interviewing sessions, it was obvious to the informants that observation was ongoing and taking place, and it appeared that there was a wide acceptance from the entire group with regard to the observations.

During analysis, the broad category of General Adjustment provided a framework for their theory of adjustment, including how some hindering factors impinge on it. To be able to unearth such factors for this and other categories is dependent, to a large extent, on the acceptance of these roles by the informants. Therefore, the role of teacher facilitated regular contact and prolonged immersion in their academic setting, while being their confidante afforded access to information and viewpoints, unsolicited at times, on their adjustment in terms of the varying aspects and the extent of their adjustment; taking a multiple role thus allows this researcher to interact with the informants in a variety of different situations, so that the connection between behaviour and context was forged. In this sense, the validity of the study is established through a match between what is observed (eg. their unhappy mood), identified (eg. homesickness) or *measured* (to what extent). In other words, the prolonged participation in the setting over an extended period of time allowed this researcher to ensure a level of congruence between concepts of adjustment and observations.

While the positive implications for research in this multiple role enriched the data and allowed access (through focus group interviewing) to informants who may be sensitive to outsiders (eg. a visiting researcher), the negative could be that they would behave less naturally if they knew they were observed. Although the question of 'reactive effects' (Bryman, 2001:330) is not straightforward, the informants seemed accustomed to the teacher-confidante-researcher role and responded naturally during focus-group interviewing and even note-taking. The researcher was sensitive to potential problems in maintaining the ongoing access and there were things that were done to smooth the path: by playing up the understanding of their problems, making sure that they knew the

information given during the interviews did not go back to other teachers or the school office and being non-judgemental about what they said during interviews or conversations.

In fact some students developed so much enthusiasm and appreciation for the research that they frequently attempted to direct the researcher to situations or other informants likely to advance the investigation. Some volunteered more interviews and wanted to arrange more contact hours. While this could have been of great help, research had to steer away from seemingly biased informants, non-spontaneous events (although unsolicited information could provide rich data) that seemed staged and from developing reliance on those informants. Therefore, while developing a rapport with informants, by essentially being friendly and putting them at ease, may promote the research, it was important not to stretch this bond too far. The researcher was aware that the mood of *friendliness* would not only result in the informants answering questions in a way that pleased her, but also delimit the relationship between teacher and student.

Research of this group was therefore facilitated by, in spite of some problems with over-enthusiastic or potentially biased informants, being able to play the role of teacher-researcher-confidante as it afforded her daily and fairly easy access to the many events, the informants and their behaviour. During this time, the researcher was immersed in a social setting (their school life) for an extended period of eight months. In fact, the eighteen PR China students were to remain in Singapore to study English for durations that ranged from six months to a year but they all stayed more than six months. Some had arrived in Singapore at slightly different times (a week at the most between each arrival) but the differences would not have affected the data; moreover, they all started their academic semester at the same time. In this sense, they were an appropriate group for this study as all the informants, to a large extent, share the kinds and range of views that are affected by the homogeneity of their circumstances, their age, class (social and financial status), academic goals and so on.

The role also involved not only making regular observations of their behaviour and talk but also listening and engaging in conversations, interviewing the informants on subjects that were related to their adjustment, collecting data on those observations (eg. field notes) and finally attempting an understanding of the adjustment theory of the group and within the context of their culture. Such access to this social setting, as teacher-confidante-researcher, that is relevant to the research problem provided the richness in the data and ensured the validity through the congruence between what had been observed and concepts which were developed. However, as mentioned above, both the rapport and the ongoing access could have been potentially problematic and it was up to the researcher to be sensitive to their situation and also discern what was not natural or staged for the researcher's benefit, and steer away from it. Playing multiple roles in order to gather data for the research is potentially problematic, but it also has many benefits and has clearly helped to advance the investigation as the informants seemed to have become accustomed to the multiple roles.

### 3.5 The questionnaire

The self-completion questionnaire involves having informants answer questions by completing the questionnaire themselves (Bryman, 2001). The use of questionnaires had several advantages and the most compelling was that it was quicker to administer than interviews. The lives of the informants as students were usually tied up with class attendance, school work, commuting and other activities that formed part of their routine. Having said this, however, the quality of the study was not seen to be compromised by the limitations of questionnaires and was welcomed by the informants as more convenient at times; they could complete them when they wanted and at the speed that they wanted to go.

Another advantage is that there is no interviewer present when a self-administered questionnaire is being completed, thus eliminating interviewer effects. Various studies have shown that characteristics of interviewers may affect the answers that people give, such as the ethnicity or social background of the interviewers. Research by Sudman and

Bradburn (1982) suggests that questionnaires work better than personal interviews as interviewer characteristics may bias answers.

Although the questionnaire is a useful tool to elicit answers in a research, there are also disadvantages. One of the most limiting aspect is the possibility of *respondent fatigue*. Respondents can become tired of answering questions that are not salient to them and can perceive them as boring. However, Altshuld and Lower (1984) suggest that when a question is relevant to a respondent, a high response rate is possible. It was therefore important in this research to make the questions salient to the students.

Two questionnaires are administered to the participants to obtain information that would not be sought in the interviews. The first is the Culture Shock questionnaire devised by Mumford (1998) to develop a useful measure of culture shock. The original study that used this 12-item questionnaire was given to 380 British workers who had traveled to 27 different countries. The findings showed that culture shock occurred where the greater the cultural difference between Britain and the country visited, the greater the culture shock. Kim (2001) supports this and contends that the level of difference between two different backgrounds may work against the stranger's adjustment. Here, the aim to use this questionnaire to see to what extent the informants felt the impact of culture shock in the host country. However, this did not prove to be useful, as explained below.

Appendix 2 represents the Mumford questionnaire and a list of words was prepared by the researcher and explained to the informants so that they understood the appropriate meanings before filling the questionnaire. It seemed a good idea at the time to administer it to the informants in the present study as the questions contained ideas that seemed appropriate for the study of culture shock in individuals who go abroad for specific purposes, and how they feel when they are there, eg. 'Have you been missing your friends and family back home?' However, the aim of the original study was to develop a measure of culture shock or to see if culture shock had occurred, whereas the aim of the present one was to uncover the factors affecting the informants' adjustment and their reasons behind it, as stated in the research questions. Moreover, even if the researcher

saw how the informants responded to the questions on its scale of three answers: most of the time, occasionally, not at all, the responses were clearly not useful for unearthing both the factors of adjustment nor the reasons behind it. It was administered to the informants in the first focus-group interview.

Another difference with the original study is that this sample is small and the participants did not travel to many different countries but reside only in one country. In the original study, there were 380 students who had traveled to 27 countries, and the data collected from the questionnaires' 3-point answer-scale would have been sufficient for a quantitative methodology.

The second questionnaire administered to the informants in this research is the General Background Questionnaire (in Appendix 3), given to the informants to fill out in the second interview. In this questionnaire, section A consists of areas related to their educational and family backgrounds. Section B consists of questions related to pre-departure knowledge and feelings on study abroad, and section C has questions related to the use of English outside the school and how much they interact in English with each other and those outside the school. None of the questions asked in the questionnaire (see Appendix 3) is truly independent of the others and is linked by common themes of study abroad and learning English. This questionnaire proved to be more useful than the Culture Shock questionnaire and validated, to some extent, some verbal remarks made during focus-group discussions. This section, unlike Mumford's Culture Shock questionnaire, consists of many open-ended questions, such as, 'Do you think it is good practice (to communicate with others outside school?)' In Mumford's questionnaire, there is no opportunity to further probe the informants for details, even if culture shock was established among them.

While the response rate to the questionnaires was not always very good, they gave them the opportunity to think about their adjustment in relation to the three areas: section A, personal background, section B, their pre-departure knowledge of Singapore and section C, their views on their interaction with people outside the school, and provided some

written validation of the verbal remarks made in the focus-group interviews. Most of the interview remarks matched the questionnaires' replies, and although these answers were short and looked like notes scribbled hurriedly (see Appendix 3, section C), they seemed heartfelt, genuine and contained more revealing views. The informants did not include their names as they were told to fill them in anonymously. Some researchers such as Bryman (2001) comment that short questionnaires are known to achieve better results, and although this General Background Questionnaire is longer than the first Culture Shock Questionnaire by Mumford, the improved response, even though they seemed scribbled, provided more substance and information.

Moreover, although the first questionnaire is shorter than the second, and, according to Bryman (2001), they may not be at times the only reason for improved response, as in this study. (See Appendix 3 for the General Background questionnaire)

#### Summary of the methods used in this study

With the limitations of questionnaires, and even observation and qualitative interviews, the research relied on a combination of all three methods because it afforded triangulation to a large extent. For example, group interviews could be helpful in the process of “indefinite triangulation” by putting individual responses into a context (Cicourel, 1974). Finally, phenomenological aims may be achieved whether questionnaires are the sole basis for gathering data or if they are employed in conjunction with other techniques.

### 3.6 Triangulation

As discussed above, this entails using more than one method or source of data in the study of social phenomenon (Bryman, 2001). This study's own methods of investigation involved observation, focus-group interviews and questionnaires, and triangulation allowed the researcher to cross-check the data to determine if what had been seen, heard and read was understood. As explained in the above section, individual interviews were



not conducted as focus group interviews provide richer and more realistic data on adjustment.

Triangulation was very much associated with a quantitative research strategy but it can also take place within qualitative research. Denzin ( 1970: 310) referred to triangulation as an approach that uses ‘ multiple observers, theoretical perspectives, sources of data and methodologies.’ Webb *et al.* (1966) advocated triangulation as an approach whereby more than one method would be used, resulting in greater confidence in the findings. Thus the use of a variety of methods to collect data allows the researcher to validate findings through triangulation. The present research uses the qualitative interviews, participant observation, questionnaires and written accounts to ensure some kind of methodological triangulation.

### 3.7 Timeline of the study

Data collection took place between April and December 2001. The initial plan was to conduct 8 interviews, with one interview per month, and questionnaires distributed over time. However, as the interviews progressed, the informants themselves raised additional or complementary issues that were not part of the original plan but eventually formed part of the study’s findings, and this unforeseen factor reduced the number of interviews to 5 sessions. Therefore, it can be said that, due to the open-ended, discursive nature of the interviews some adjustment as to the number of interviews and questions was made, although the researcher had planned to follow an interview guide (as in the above Fig. 3.1) consisting of some pre-determined questions and prompts. Nevertheless, the interviews were, in general, guided by an inventory of issues that were covered in each session, as the collection progressed, and because the study is essentially guided by grounded theory features, an iterative process of refinement took place, whereby the data collection and analysis proceeded in tandem, repeatedly referring back to each other. (See Appendix 1: Timeline of Data Collection that shows the rounds of administering interviews, questionnaires and instructions for a written account)

### 3.8 Reliability and validity

Reliability and validity are important criteria in establishing and assessing the quality of data in a quantitative research (Bryman, 2001). However, there has been some concern among qualitative researchers regarding their relevance for qualitative research. The stance that some researchers have been taking in relation to the issues is to assimilate reliability and validity into qualitative research with little change of meaning other than playing down the importance of measurement. Mason (1996) sticks very closely to the meaning of the criteria established and required for quantitative research, where they have been researched to a large extent. In her work on qualitative research, she argues that reliability, validity and generalisability are 'different kinds of measures of the quality, rigour and wider potential of research, which are achieved according to certain methodological and disciplinary conventions and principles' (pp. 21). LeCompte and Goetz (1982) and Kirk and Miller (1986) also discuss reliability and validity in relation to qualitative research but infuse the terms with a somewhat different meaning to that of Mason. LeCompte and Goetz take the view of the criteria in the following ways:

- *Internal Reliability* exists when there is agreement among members of a research team on what they see or hear. This implies that there is more than one observer.
- *External Reliability* is achieved when the degree to which the study can be replicated is great. However, they also remark that this is difficult in qualitative research because it's not possible to 'freeze' a social setting and its circumstances to make it replicable. To resolve the problem, they suggest that a researcher replicating qualitative research adopt a similar social role to that of the original researcher. In light of this, it is important that the researcher (in an original research) writes in detail the methods, procedures, feelings and thoughts during her work, so that the role she has taken can be replicated to other research situations
- *Internal validity* is established when there is a good match between the researcher's observations and the theoretical ideas they develop. LeCompte and Goetz argue that validity is a strength of qualitative research, specifically

ethnographic research, because the participation in the lives of the group over time allows her to obtain high congruence between observation and concepts.

- *External validity* is identified when the degree to which findings can be generalized across social settings is notable. This, however, represents a problem, according to LeCompte and Goetz, because qualitative researchers tend to use case studies and small samples, as in this research.

The above treatment of reliability and validity shows that some researchers are able to use the terms in very similar ways to quantitative researchers when they seek to develop criteria for evaluating qualitative research.

However, some writers have taken the criteria beyond the conventional and neo-conventional elements. They have suggested that qualitative studies should be judged or evaluated according to quite different criteria used by quantitative researchers. Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Guba and Lincoln (1994) propose that it is necessary to specify ways of establishing and assessing the quality of qualitative research that provide an alternative to reliability and validity. *Trustworthiness*, as they proposed, is a primary criterion for assessing qualitative study, and this is made up of four criteria where each has an equivalent in quantitative research:

- *Credibility* is said to parallel internal validity, as the multiple accounts of social reality may create the credibility of the account. This ensures that the researcher is carrying out the research according to the rules of good practice and validating the accounts with the respondents, which can be achieved through triangulation
- *Transferability*, parallels external validity. Qualitative researchers are encouraged to produce *thick description*, as coined by Geertz (1973a). Guba and Lincoln argue that a thick description provides others with what they refer to as a database for making judgements about the potential transferability of findings to other research milieux.
- *Dependability*, is said to parallel reliability. The above writers argue that, to establish the quality of research in terms of this criterion of trustworthiness,

researchers should adopt an 'auditing' approach. This entails that complete records are kept, including problem formulation, selection of research participants, fieldwork notes, interview transcripts, data analysis decisions etc.

- *Confirmability* parallels objectivity. It is concerned with ensuring that the researcher has not allowed personal values or theoretical inclinations to prejudice the conduct of the research and findings produced from it.

Having discussed the above, the main point is that these ideas differ from those of writers like LeCompte and Goetz in seeking criteria for evaluating qualitative research that represent a departure from those employed by quantitative research.

Some writers, however, propose a midway position between the criteria of quantitative research and an alternative criteria in evaluating qualitative research. Hammersley (1998), who lies between the two positions, reformulates or proposes a definition of validity, which is that an empirical account must be plausible and credible; it should also necessarily take into account the amount and kind of evidence used in relation to an account.

He also suggests *relevance* as an important criterion of qualitative research. It is taken to be assessed from the vantage point of the importance of a topic within its field. He points out that,

'To be of value, research findings must not only be valid but also relevant to issues of actual potential concern, that is, to shared values...It was not sufficient for findings of an ethnographic study to be true for them to have value. Equally important is that they make a contribution to knowledge that is relevant to some public concern' (p. 70)

To a large extent, the differences among the three positions reflect divergences but nowadays most researchers would adopt the midpoint by treating their accounts as one of a number of possible representations rather than as definitive versions of social realities

(Bryman, 2001). They also substantiate their accounts through some of the techniques suggested by Lincoln and Guba, such as triangulation.

### 3.9 Overview of the issues of criteria

There are qualitative researchers who still advocate the extremes of, on the one hand, attempting to establish a set of universal laws of human behaviour by adhering strictly to standard criteria of reliability and validity. On the other hand, there are those who claim that there are no certainties and that everything is completely culturally and historically relative. Guba and Lincoln's (1994) unease, for example, about the simple application of reliability and validity standards to qualitative research is that the criteria presuppose that a single absolute account of social reality is feasible. They feel that there may be other credible representations of the same phenomenon. Others, such as Ang (1996) suggest that the research shouldn't be confined to only establishing reliability and validity, and that there is a responsibility to do more with what respondents provide in their statements or data,

‘What is of critical importance, therefore, is the way in which those statements are made sense of, that is, interpreted. Here lies the ultimate responsibility of the researcher. The comfortable assumption that it is the reliability and accuracy of the methodologies being used that will ascertain the validity of the outcomes of the research, thereby reducing the researcher's responsibility to the technical matter, is rejected’ (p.47)

Somewhere in between the two is a less extreme approach and this recognizes the limited nature of standardized criteria to the field of qualitative research work but still values its usefulness. This section has dealt with the issue of criteria to assure the quality of qualitative research. In applying the criteria of reliability and validity to the research, it is important, therefore, to keep within a set framework such as proposed by the writers of the three stances above.

The following chapter attempts to examine the data and build a systematic account of what has been observed and recorded, so as to arrive at an discover the informants' theories of adjustment through this process.

## **CHAPTER 4 DATA ANALYSIS – FACTORS THAT PROMOTED AND HINDERED ADJUSTMENT**

This chapter is in two parts:

**PART I** introduces Grounded Theory and discusses the role of Pre-Existing Theory in Grounded Theory in relation to this research, Data Collection and Methods of Analysis

**PART II** discusses the results of the Analysis

### **Part I**

#### **4.1 Grounded theory: Its usefulness for this research**

Grounded theory probably represents the most influential general strategy for conducting qualitative data analysis, and also has become the most widely used framework for qualitative analysis, though how far the approach is followed varies from study to study (Bryman, 2001). Based on grounded theory, the methodology of this research focuses on qualitative analysis that includes exploration, induction, deduction, analytical and interpretative processes and most importantly, theory building.

As early as the 1960s, grounded theory was developed to help qualitative research, regarded at the time, as being unscientific. The chief well-spring of the approach comes from *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* by Glaser and Strauss (1967), and later in 1994, Strauss and Corbin remarked that its purpose was:

‘ to legitimate careful qualitative research, as by the 1960s this had sunk to a low status among an increasing number of sociologists because it was not believed capable of adequate verification’ (p. 275)

Although qualitative research was suspiciously regarded and criticized as unverifiable, its gradual development has provided the means to close the gap between structure and agency until a methodology that reflected the empirical world was found. Blumer (1998), an important founder of symbolic interactionism, favoured introspection and participant observation as different to using methods analogous to those used in the natural sciences such as questionnaires and statistical analysis.

Within this research methodology this researcher would be able to deal with the question of how the sample individuals know and perceive things in the social world and therefore it would mean to go *into the field* to discover how they conceive of this world, and then to unearth the evidence to be found in the external, objective signs provided by patterns of behaviour, in particular, verbal behaviour, i.e. talk. Moreover, there is a system of coding and categorizing that provides verification to a large extent, and is legitimated further by its attempt to provide a means of linking theoretically based and empirically based research where the underlying sociology is agency focused. Although this means that a researcher would always respect agents as having the ability to control their destinies or actions, it is also important to be aware that they do not always do so.

The processes of grounded theory would therefore help this researcher uncover relevant conditions and perhaps determine and understand how the Chinese students in this study have responded, or not, to changing conditions and to the consequences of their actions. It would, therefore, be the role of this researcher to understand the revelations.

Since an empirically-based methodology will help develop a theory about the phenomenon studied on the basis of the empirical data collected, it is also important to refer to existing literature on theories that have already revealed similar phenomena elsewhere. For instance, although it is difficult to balance the emergent codes in grounded theory against the influence of pre-existing theory, one cannot ignore all categories in earlier research literature. The task is to 'develop an emergent fit between the data and a pre-existent category that might work.' (Glaser, 1978:148). Grounded Theory practice would thus allow this researcher to develop an 'emergent fit' by negotiating between



categories that emerge through analysis and knowledge of other categorical schemes utilized in relevant literature and theory. In this way, through a comparison of emergent categories with pre-existing categories, new and deeper understanding of the experience can be developed.

#### 4.2 The role of pre-existing theories in the grounded theory approach

It has never been easy to describe grounded theory, especially in all its facets. Although grounding theory in data suggests that new concepts and ideas have to spring forth from the research data with the researcher having very few, if any, notions about the phenomenon studied, it is not as simple as that. However, many grounded theory texts seem to advocate this simplistic inductive method for generating theory, and Glaser argues that ‘the first step in gaining theoretical sensitivity is to enter the research setting with as few predetermined ideas as possible’ (1978:3). Many researchers encourage this method of applying the *tabula rasa* to collection and analysis. However, Ezzy (2002) believes that researchers are influenced by some ideas, and advises that the first step to dealing with the influence of preconceptions is not to deny or hide them, but to formally state them. The researcher should, therefore, enter into ‘an ongoing simultaneous process of deduction and induction, of theory building, testing and rebuilding’ (p. 10).

The problem for this research is not a struggle with denying the existence of preconceived ideas from prior hypotheses but how these interact with the research process; for this researcher, is difficult to conceive of having a blank mind before going into a research project. In fact, the researcher needs ‘theoretical sensitivity and knowledge in order to compare the generated theory with existing theories to further illuminate the findings’. (Tarp, 2006:173) Even Strauss and Corbin (1990) themselves point out that literature reviews are often an important part in developing grounded theory, although they have also said that ‘it makes no sense to start with “received” theories or variables (categories) because these are likely to inhibit or impede the development of new theoretical formulations, unless of course your purpose is to open up and find new meanings in them.’ (p. 50). However, despite the exposure to theories,

concepts and thoughts through literature review, it would be safe to say that this researcher did not find herself committed to a general theoretical scheme, although the result may confirm the relevance of certain of the factors studied here to general theories of intercultural adjustment and substantiate the literature reviewed in chapter 2. Therefore, reviewing and selecting relevant aspects had helped to narrow the focus of this research in guiding the collection of data and its subsequent analysis.

Strict adherence to a general scheme may also result in not discovering new understandings of the phenomenon under investigation. Nevertheless, an understanding of general theories of intercultural adjustment, its problems and variables shaped what this researcher had seen, heard and understood when conducting the research. What is important here during the process of analysis is not to avoid similar forming of preconceptions but to prevent them, as far as possible, from narrowing what is observed and theorized.

#### 4.3 Data collection

Looking at the data during collection was helpful if not absolutely necessary at the time. This helped prevent excluding certain types of data, if the researcher waited till the *end of collection* to examine it. In fact, it was during the initial cursory data analysis that some unanticipated issues were discovered and noticed, and had arisen and seemed to have affected the state of mind of some of the informants (such as a disoriented feeling related to the fact that Singapore does not have four climatic seasons, and China does). The issues were pursued further in subsequent data collecting. Simultaneous data collection and analysis therefore became an exercise in combining both activities that essentially aimed at, as Ezzy (2002) says, building on the strengths of qualitative methods as an inductive method for building theory and arriving at interpretations from the perspective of the people being studied.

#### 4.3.1 The process of collection and analysis

One of the central tenets of grounded theory is that data collection and data analysis are interrelated processes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This research process therefore involved going from a general set of questions at the start of data collection to narrow ones towards the end while looking at the data, revising them and then diverging, but only in so far as the process allowed the data to explore deeper issues but stay relevant to the thesis questions. Therefore, the early data generated more questions to probe further into phenomena but it was always helpful to keep going back to the original over-arching inquiry from time to time. It was not anticipated, for example, that weather, geographical directions or food were so strongly associated with their physical and emotional states and were affecting their adjustment to Singapore. More time was then spent to check and correctly identify a link between intolerance of such general environmental conditions and adjustment in Singapore, and this resulted in further interviews. The following is a transcript of a later interview on weather

Researcher: You talked about the weather of Singapore last week. Why does it bother you? (More reference was made to remind the informant of the previous interview, but is not included here)

Informant: Yes...weather here is problematic

Researcher: How does it make you feel?

Informant: Umm...weather gives me headache...can't concentrate in school.

Researcher: The classrooms have air-conditioning. Does this help?

Informant: It's too hot! Umm...this tropical weather is not suitable for Chinese people from cold parts

Some informants became more garrulous even, providing opinions that eventually went off track. Often the interviews became more like conversations and would have provided richer fodder for research, but not specific to the scope of this thesis. Ultimately, it always came back to a question of adjustment and the factors that affect it, which guided the interviews.

#### 4.3.2 Data Collection Instruments

The instruments of data collection included the following:

Questionnaires. Two questionnaires were used in the collection.

**Culture Shock Questionnaire:** Mumford (1998) developed it to validate facets of culture shock such as strain, sense of loss, confusion etc. It was administered originally to British volunteer workers who had lived in 27 different countries, and showed as predicted that the greater the cultural difference between Britain and the other country, the greater the cultural shock. (See Appendix 2: Culture Shock questionnaire)

**General background Questionnaire:** A longer questionnaire that is divided into 3 sections with 7 questions:

- A. educational and family background information ranging from the number of years spent studying English in China, occupation(s) to city or province of origin in China,
- B. reasons for choosing Singapore to learn English and pre-departure knowledge about their host country, and
- C. their views of their school, the method of learning English, their exposure to English outside the classroom and their interaction with local Singaporeans. This section was administered with the help of verbal cues from the researcher as it contained short open-ended questions, especially on interaction adjustment, that were formed to elicit as much information as possible at the start. Interaction adjustment questions included items that had special focus on English-based interaction and asked about interacting with local Singaporeans on a daily basis, socializing with Singaporeans and speaking with them. Moreover, it also raised awareness of their own strategies and helped the researcher gauge their enthusiasm about language learning and how they perceive it as related to their adjustment. They also needed occasional prompting for clarification or explanation. (For an example, see Appendix 3: General Background questionnaire)

Interviews. As explained in Chapter 3, these comprised of individual and focus-group interviews and were both semi-structured and unstructured. Semi-structured interviews were guided by pre-set questions that covered their relationships with people involved in their routine and others outside the school. They also covered topics that emerged during data collection such as their perceptions of cultural similarities and dissimilarities and how they, if so, affected their moods and states of mind. The unstructured interviews mostly focused on the students' emotions, such as hopes, fears, if any, of the future, their impressions of the people and environment in Singapore, within the school and beyond, that helped to shed light on their levels and methods of adjustment. These unstructured interviews did not need many pre-set questions as their aim was to allow topics to emerge freely but were also steered back to the main theme of adjustment. (See Appendix 4 for two examples of Interviews)

Written Work. This refers to short summaries individually written by the informants just before the end of the study. These 'documents' were not initially requested as part of the study but were volunteered by two of the informants and then suggested by them to the group as an opportunity to write their thoughts and feelings in a two-page document summarizing their sojourn (average word count 250 words). They were also aware that they would be used as a source of data for this study. Guidelines were also suggested to limit the writing to the intercultural experiences of their sojourn.

#### 4.4. Methods of analysis

##### 4.4.1 Coding procedures

Sorting through data involves coding procedures; these provide researchers with analytic tools for handling masses of raw data at times. Here, many categories had been created in the initial sorting but some had to be discarded although they were interesting and worthy of further exploration but could not fit into the scope of this investigation. Coding and categorizing therefore required time and organization if a clear taxonomy of concepts were to be achieved. Moreover, data collection procedures and following the chronology

of interview questions may also cloud the analysis process and this would inevitably result in dismantling codes and then recoding. It had required constant data revisiting and a strict application of methods such as the open, axial and selective coding to facilitate the analysis.

Within the parameters of the general research questions, this researcher had to inspect the data to develop categories or even a topology of responses, which were not defined prior to the analysis but emerged during analysis. While the general issues that are of interest are determined prior to analysis, the specific nature of the categories and themes to be explored were not predetermined. In this study, the researcher began analysis by studying interview transcripts, as well as the questionnaires and written documents to elicit the factors in the life events, interactions with others, strategies and tactics that had been adopted by the informants, and to what extent the aspects affect their adjustment. The coding then began with identifying themes within the data. The following paragraphs explain the different coding methods.

#### Open coding

Following Strauss and Corbin's 'process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data' (1990: 61), the open coding method involved categorising the data openly by scrutinising interview transcripts, questionnaires and the written documents, line by line, then word by word. Even at this stage microanalysis begins, of words and phrases, and therefore is also invaluable not only in forming in-vivo codes but also in making the researcher aware of how much can be packed into small bits of data, looking at details not only descriptively but analytically. To illustrate how this process was done, an example is provided below:

During research, it was important to know what factors affected their adjustment to general living conditions in Singapore. Reading through the data the first time, notes were made in the margins beside the following lines from the interviews:

- ‘ living environment is good and comfortable’
- ‘ my accommodations are close to the public transport’
- ‘ my landlord is nice lady. She makes my stay here comfortable.
- ‘ unhappy about living conditions.’
- ‘ accommodations are bad.’
- ‘ worried about housing conditions.’

The notes in the margin of the interview transcripts highlighted the importance of living conditions to the informants. As such, a theme emerged about how they thought about one of the factors affecting their adjustment, which is the living conditions of their new environment. The label ‘living conditions’ was given to such lines, and also a memo as a reminder that the code could be further broken down depending on how differently each informant was oriented towards the living conditions.

It often felt like experimentation involving attempts to devise a variety of conceptual labels until appropriate ones were found to fit the data, and this also included deleting the ones that were too similar, narrow or even too vague; they often overlapped but it was also illuminating to see how many overlaps there were and how they did so.

This stage is the most generative in this analysis and although not straightforward, the process eventually resulted in the forming of main categories that depict the issues, problems, concerns and matters important to the students. The category ‘living conditions’ therefore became one of a few others that came under General Adjustment. Three broad categories stand out from the data, with each one having dimensions related to living conditions, weather, food etc. Also, within each category, the informants have differing views about those dimensions, where some see them as promoting adjustment and others view them as hindering. The main categories are:

General Adjustment

Interaction Adjustment

Adjustment to a new culture

These categories are comparable with those in other research by Black and Stephens (1989), Black and Black; and Black and Gregersen (1991), who indicate there are three facets of adjustment: adjustment to work, adjustment to host-country nationals and adjustment to the general environment of the host country. Other researchers such as Harrison, Chadwick and Scales (1996), Nicholson and Imaizumi (1993), Parker and McEvoy (1993), Selmer (1999) and Shaffer, Harrison and Gilley (1999) have also carried out studies and confirmed the validity of the three facets. Although this study's categories are similar to those of previous studies and are guided by them, they have emerged, to a large extent, as a result of what the data yielded and their analysis. However, this researcher will extend the development of those concepts that will reflect how they are embodied in the data and more importantly, the precise meanings of such concepts will be presented.

#### Axial coding

Axial coding, according to Ezzy (2002), aims to 'integrate codes around the axes of central categories.' (p. 91). Data here are put back in new ways after open coding by making connections between the categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This is done by linking codes to contexts, consequences, causal conditions, patterns of action/ interaction and phenomenon.

The phenomenon is the central idea to which the data refer. This research points to experiences of adjustment by the informants as the main theme and is based on their responses to interviews, questionnaires and written work summarizing their sojourn. At this stage of the analysis, questions such as, 'To what do the data refer?' and 'What conditions give rise to the central idea?' had to be asked. Furthermore, the action/interaction undertaken to manage and deal with the phenomenon is examined. Such actions can be facilitating or hindering factors to their learning.



Causal conditions refer to events that lead to the development of the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In this study, the causal event can be said to be the study abroad language-learning program, and its specific properties are environmental conditions, interaction and culture. Within this context where the actions of managing their study abroad experience take place, the coding helps in organising the data so that one can see where and how the students get their experiences, and what they were, while in Singapore. The consequences or outcomes of the actions or interaction also have to be looked at as they are responses taken to manage the phenomenon. Failure to take action is also considered a consequence, so that consequences can be either actual or potential. In this study, actual consequences are based on respondent actions taken to cope with adjustment, and result in either satisfaction, after making efforts to adjust, such as more interaction with locals or in academic pursuit, or dissatisfaction. The data also reflect student concerns with their insufficient linguistic skills and contact, cultural dissimilarity, and dissonance with certain environmental issues, resulting in their avoidance coping styles, or not acting upon any attempt to adjust to their new environment.

#### Selective coding

Selective coding requires the researcher to identify the core category around which the analysis focuses (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In this study, the core category is predicated on the experiences of adjustment: general adjustment to the environment and interaction adjustment with local people and adjustment to new aspects of the culture. These experiences of adjustment are also linked to their perceptions of the properties of adjustment above as they (the perceptions) also affect their ability to use their strategies of coping in their new world.

## **Part II**

### **4.5 Analysis of data from questionnaires**

As explained in Chapter 3 and above, two questionnaires, The Culture Shock Questionnaire and The General Background Questionnaire, were administered during the collection of data as adjuncts to the other sources of data, such as interviews and written documents, in this study. In many ways, the self-completion questionnaire and the structured interview are similar but a central difference is that the informants have to read each question themselves and answer the questions themselves. In this study, because of the informants' limited facility with English, the researcher assisted them by explaining what the questions asked to ensure that they found them clear, unambiguous, easy to understand and answer as language students.

#### **4.5.1 The Culture Shock Questionnaire**

The Culture Shock questionnaire was devised by Mumford (1998) to develop a useful measure of culture shock, which is practical and simple in its theoretical dimensions. In its original study, the 12-item questionnaire was administered to 380 British workers who had traveled to 27 different countries. It showed the greater the cultural difference between Britain and the country visited, the greater the culture shock. Most research supports this, and Kim (2001) contends that when strangers arrive in a new environment with differing ethnic backgrounds, it has relevance on their subsequent adjustment in the host environment. Therefore the level of difference between two different backgrounds may work against the stranger's adjustment. The intention to use the questionnaire, therefore, was to see to what extent the informants felt the effects of culture shock but it did not prove to be useful as the sample was small and did not shed more light on the data from the interviews, general background questionnaire and written documents. (See Appendix 2)

#### 4.5.2 General Background Questionnaire

Data from the General Background questionnaire supplement and provide additional information to the other data, in particular the interview data. It is a simply constructed questionnaire of 7 questions aimed to elicit the informants' views on, in general, interaction adjustment and, specifically, their language learning experiences in their new environment. There are no response-sets nor a Likert scale to measure degree or frequency since the aim is to elicit statements that reflect their adjustment. It is kept short to prevent 'respondent fatigue' (Bryman, 2001:131) during the answering, since a wordy questionnaire can be off-putting and potentially lead to many unanswered questions in the first place.

Section A consists of two questions on family and educational backgrounds. In Section B, two questions ask for reasons for choosing Singapore as an educational destination and pre-departure knowledge, and Section C consists of questions on their views of school, exposure to English in and out of school and their interaction with locals. The students provide names but are assured that they are not used since, in the opinion of this researcher, the 'anonymity' may better elicit reports on their adjustment process.

##### General Background

The informants come from various urbanized provinces and cities throughout China, and are from middle-income backgrounds where their parents are able to provide a study-abroad education. A typical answer looks like this,

City or Province: Henan Province

Father's occupation: Land surveyor

Mother's occupation: Supervisor

Years of learning English: 6 years

The students are 18 to 20 years old, and altogether, they have had the requisite six years of foundation English language. As the culture of learning English in China is, to a large extent, still fundamentally concerned with mastery of knowledge, their learning had focused mainly on achieving knowledge of grammar and vocabulary.

#### Choosing Singapore as an educational destination

Due to its open-door policies in the 1970s, China had become increasingly exposed to the outside world. Its awareness of the importance of English as a means of international commerce and communication also increased accordingly, which is evidenced in a student's remark, 'The reason (to study in Singapore) is we want to have a good environment for English because we know English is very various in the world' (S. 12/M). In the researcher's view, the student translates *various* from the Chinese word *bù tóng* to mean different, distinct or not the same. He believes that, other than the way English is learned in China, he would probably benefit from learning it in its authentic and natural setting outside China. Another student supports this view, ' (I) leave China to go study in Singapore because this is one of English-spoken countries. Have better language environment than China.' (S. 8/F) Many PR China students, such as these informants, see the value of learning English outside their own country and believe that Singapore is a natural choice for English language study, with large numbers of students flowing into the country at the same time as its desire to attract those foreign students. In 1998, Jin and Cortazzi wrote that 'Chinese learners of English...(are) probably the largest national group of foreign language students in the world.' (p. 99). The numbers would probably have increased considerably by now.

In this questionnaire, they make explicit their reasons, ' It (Singapore) is very near China and education is similar with UK. She is cheaper than other country and (we) can communicate here than (in) another foreign place. There are also many Chinese.' (S. 2/F) The PR China students frequently refer to the term *huá rén shē huī*, or the Overseas Chinese Community, which refers to the Chinese who are born or bred in countries outside China. The intrinsic meaning is in its implication that all overseas Chinese after

all originate from and have roots that are inextricably linked to China, the motherland. To the PR China students in this study, the fact that 'there are many Chinese' in Singapore means they would be among people who are of their own kind, with whom they feel culturally familiar and whose culture and language they would understand. A thread of similar reasoning runs through the whole group, where the motivation to study in Singapore is driven by the right study-abroad conditions, such as geographic proximity, a relatively lower cost of living and in particular, cultural similarities, 'No difference between us (the people of PR China and Singapore). We are from the same culture, therefore, we don't have much difference' (S. 6/M)

However, other writers warn that it is not the actual similarity that is important, but the 'degree of perceived similarity, the degree to which people think they are similar to others.' (Gudykunst and Kim, 2003:341).

This then explains why other informants do not find adjustment is as easily attainable, which is due to their perception that there are no such similarities. These students present contrasting theories of cultural similarities, 'The cultures are different between the two countries (China and Singapore). There are differences in lifestyle and food.' (S. 9/M) Beyond such differences are also language differences, 'They (Singaporeans) can speak many languages that sound strange. The pronunciation is difficult to understand' (S. 3/F). The student refers to Singlish, or a 'low variety' of Singapore English (Young, 2003) used in informal situations such as conversations among family and friends. As its phonological, lexical and syntactical features are very different to those of Standard English and other varieties of English, these students find it peculiar and hard to understand, 'I do not think there is a good language opportunity in Singapore for me. As we know, the pronunciation of Singaporean is not very good. I prefer the native speaker's language.' Although the students have become ambivalent in their views on Singapore, having chosen it as their educational destination and finding out that the cultural similarities have not greatly facilitated their adjustment, they have come to accept that there is a similarity yet a difference, 'We define it as different cultures and backgrounds. I'm the same with them (Singaporeans) about race. I'm different from them about culture and habits.' Such insight not only prevails among them as a guiding theory on their new

social world but also as a realization that such a peculiarity exists between them and the Singapore Chinese.

To many PR China students, Singapore is an obvious educational destination as they are able to gain entry into the country relatively faster than other English-speaking countries, such as Britain, USA, Australia and Canada. Because of its desire to attract foreign students, Singapore paves the way for foreign students into the country and thus into its numerous language centres, 'It is easy to get a visa into Singapore'.

Pre-departure knowledge for the informants comes mostly from media information in television programmes, 'We could know her history and about Singapore only from TV programmes in China' (S. 2/F). For many cross-cultural travelers, the components of media, such as television, newspapers, magazines, books, brochures etc. are used to broaden their knowledge of their destinations, thus creating 'an adaptive potential which is a matter of preparedness of change prior to entering the new environment' (Gudykunst and Kim, 2003: 369). Moreover, there are varying degrees of how much pre-departure knowledge they have, from 'a little' and 'not very much' to 'I don't know anything at all'. Such unequal knowledge among them explains how they moved to their new environment with differing levels of realism in their expectations.

An overall picture forms in terms of their reasons for choosing Singapore and the realities they faced after their arrival. As they theorize about their choice and the reasons behind it, it is apparent a perceived better English-language environment and the cultural similarities, which they expected would facilitate the adjustment process in the new culture, had motivated them. Most of them have found, upon their arrival, that they are as disappointed in the English language standard as they are surprised by differences in culture and habits.

Views on school, exposure to English in and out of school and their interaction with locals.

Their collective views on the school and its standards of teaching are reflected in the following statements, 'Some of the teachers' native language is not English but they are good in speaking. I feel surprised because they are clever. It's not matter they are not native English. A school must have good teachers, good style of teaching and has complete equipment.' (S. 15/F). Many of them had already heard about the language school in China, from students who had been to Singapore and returned to China, 'I heard that this is the best language school in Singapore and the teachers here are better than any others' (S. 2/F), a statement that is echoed throughout this section. The fact that most of the teachers are non-native speakers and non-Caucasian does not worry the students as they consider teaching ability to be more important. Their collective view on the school also brings out some opinions on how they learn English in the present school. For them, the norms of learning English have always been based on learning English as a Foreign Language, with strong focus on grammar and vocabulary. In the present school, their language classes are still modeled on the EFL style but the students also welcome the obvious departure from close attention to texts and memorization of vocabulary, 'They are good teachers, patient, and have good methods of teaching, with good experience' (S. 4/F).

What they most dislike is the pervasive use of *Singlish* to which they are exposed on a daily basis, 'Although Singapore people have ability to speak many languages but I don't like about the people of Singapore (is) the Singaporean pronunciation. It's the way of their speaking.' (S. 6/M) The same view is echoed through the questionnaire, 'Their (Singaporean) pronunciation is poor. My friend he and I can't understand the people here.' Overall, the informants do not feel their exposure to English outside the school is of any beneficial assistance, 'The environment to learn English is not very good, but there are many good English language schools.' (S. 2/F) This student feels that her learning is confined to the school, with no collateral learning from the environment in her daily life outside it.

In the questionnaire, two characteristics stand out more than the rest, and they are related to interaction with locals: to what extent they interact with locals and with which local ethnic group. An informant seeks his own opportunities for interaction from those he feels will help him improve, ' I dislike Singlish. Most Indian Singaporean can speak standard English. I would like to talk with them. Basically I don't talk to Chinese Singaporean in English. I couldn't get used to Singlish in the first few months. But some of the China people speak Singlish in the sequence.'(S. 14/M) He appears to have developed an increased understanding of differences between the differing ethnic groups within the host culture, as well as an expanded behavioural capacity to manage the interaction process by seeking out discourse with the group that benefits him. This student refers to other PR China people who reside in Singapore that adopt Singlish 'in the sequence' or 'by time', from the word *zhú jiān*, in Chinese. However, there is a sense of disapproval in that he does not think Singlish is standard English and worthy of learning. Another student gives a measure of the feelings she has when interacting with locals, ' Everyday I speak to native Singaporeans for more the four times, including landlord, colleagues, friends. 90% friendly, 20% helpful, 30% proud, 2-5 % mental problems.' (S. 17/F) While they see interaction with host nationals as important, it is not always seen to be successful by most of the informants. Kim's (2001) axioms explain the differential degree or rate at which adjustment takes place across individuals and environments, ' The stranger's pre-dispositional conditions, such as preparedness for change, ethnic proximity and adaptive personality, influence and in turn are influenced by, his or her intercultural transformation.'(p. 90)

In this section of the questionnaire, the students raise issues concerning school, exposure to English in and out of school and their interaction with locals. The overall satisfaction with their school and its teaching staff reflect an adjustment to their academic environment, where their expectations of teaching standards are met despite the teachers being non-native speakers. However, they strongly disapprove of the low-variety Singlish commonly used in Singapore and believe they would not be able to improve their speaking skills from their exposure to it. This is also inexorably linked to the amount of interaction with host nationals and which ethnic group of host nationals in multi-cultural



Singapore. With Singlish being the dialect of informal communication among its natives, the informants find it impedes understanding and discourages interaction with locals, especially among local Chinese, to the extent that one of them prefers not to communicate with them. This resistance to engage in host-national interaction might then make it difficult for those informants, who view Singlish as inadequate, to adjust themselves to the new language environment.

Although the questionnaires have an easy-to-follow design and most of the questions are explained and clarified by the researcher so as to ensure that the informants find them clear, unambiguous, easy to understand and answer as language students, there is no opportunity to probe them further to elaborate their answers. Nonetheless, the questionnaire data reveal some of the main themes which begin to appear in the data, and set the scene for the next stage.

Interviews, on the other hand, allow additional information, even if it is in the form of snippets about their everyday life, how they cope with new aspects and other related or even unrelated matters. The next three sections involve the analysis and discussion of factors in the study's different domains of adjustment, where interview data provide information on those factors.

#### 4.6 Analysis of data from Interviews

General Adjustment, as first discussed in section 4.4 of this chapter, is one of the distinct facets of intercultural adjustment and in this study it seems the most logical descriptor for what is going on, namely the issues and concerns of the informants with certain aspects in the environment. As long as the students remain in contact with and participate in the host environment, it serves as the cultural, sociopolitical and physical context for their experiences. As such, the factors in the physical environment would help shape the nature of their adjustment process.

As was shown in chapter 2, section 2.3.3, much research has been done on general adjustment to physical factors in the environment, and Babiker et al (1980), for example, had devised a culture-distance index that introduced the concept of culture-distance to account for the amount of distress experienced by students from one culture, studying in another, where index items included variables such as climate, clothes, religion, food and family structure. Also, Black and Stephens (1989) in studying general adjustment have used these aspects. In his study of the adjustment of mainland Chinese academics and students to the life in Singapore, Tsang (2001) examines how background, personality, situational and performance constructs are related to and affect general and interaction adjustment. In the grand theory of intercultural adjustment, its reality, according to Kim (1988), is universal where countless individuals are faced with the challenges of life in a foreign cultural environment. This section shows the physical environment can be as challenging as the cultural differences within the new environment, and adjustive processes are examined in order to throw light on this study's theory of general adjustment.

Therefore, research, as discussed, show that when adjustive changes of strangers are studied, the numerous aspects involved that can affect those processes can range from tastes for different foods, dress habits, leisure activities, religious practices, social values and attitudes toward host and home culture. In this study, the intervening factors are those expressed by the informants and upon which their theory of general adjustment rests and range from housing conditions, food, weather and other environmental features. Such factors reflect the conditions that impinge upon what they do during their sojourn, and from their perspective, work to promote or hamper their adjustive actions or interactions.

The following provides an analysis of the intervening factors, where examples from the data are provided to support their theory. Some field notes are included to support both analysis and findings, where description of the location, who is involved, what prompted the discussion of certain issues, etc. are provided. This *behind-the-scenes* insight into their daily lives, experiences and beliefs has been useful as it is jotted down as a record

that supplements the main data collected, where they are referenced to validate the responses from the informants.

#### 4.6.1 General adjustment

##### 4.6.1.1 Promoting factors: comfortable, settled, satisfied, not worrying, accustomed, at home, impressed and secure

Furnham and Bochner (1982) have argued that foreign students face many problems, and accommodation difficulty is one of them. Not all student sojourners, however, find their accommodations unpleasant. The students below find their satisfaction dependent on having amenities and good location:

1. ‘ I’m quite comfortable. I have TV. I try not to think about other things I need because it’s not my home and I shouldn’t worry’, (S. 5/ M)
2. ‘ My accommodations are close to the public transport.’ (S. 12/M).
3. ‘ My landlord is nice lady. She makes my stay comfortable.’ (S. 8/F)

(Indicators in the brackets show the numbering and gender of each student, e.g. Student 5./M. Although gender is not considered in the analysis, it facilitates the referencing of the student.)

Although the students realise that their accommodations are not like ‘home’, they are satisfied with the present situation and the relative material comfort it offers, although student 5 in statement 1 complains he needs more amenities. To him, having good amenities is one of his conditions for comfort. Statement 2 is another example that shows the student being satisfied with his accommodations, and being located near public transport means he can commute easily from his home. Statement 3 indicates that the student’s comfort is related to having a ‘nice’ landlady. These students’ adjustment theories are thus closely linked to their satisfaction with their accommodations and the various factors that facilitate their transition here. Researchers, such as Babiker *et al* (1980) and Oberg (1960), explain that the sojourner can work in and enjoy the new

culture, despite the occasional differences in items such as material comfort and culture shock.

Others do not give reasons for their satisfaction but indicate they are comfortable because they have become used to their new environment and are able to overcome difficulties,

4. 'I feel like I'm living at home instead of strange place. Quite comfortable' (S. 8/F)
5. 'I think I can adjust to new environment here. There must be difficulties but it will be fine.' (S. 15/F)

In statement 4 the student feels comfortable because she derives a homely feeling in the new environment and accepts that the 'strange place' is the new home for the duration of her sojourn. This openness and receptivity to new challenges are explained by Kim (1988) who says that those who are open-minded and receptive toward the host culture and who are more resilient under stressful circumstances, are likely to better manage the challenges and be stronger in absorbing cultural shocks in the adjustment process.

Statement 5 indicates the student's preparedness for change which, research shows, promotes adjustive potential and according to Kim (ibid:135), 'psychological readiness' to cope with difficulties. This explains why Student 15 says that 'it will be fine', as though she was bracing herself for new challenges in readiness to manage her difficulties and adjust to her environment. Kim also says that this readiness facilitates a stranger's adjustive capacity in the host environment and reflects the qualities of flexibility. Further statements below summarise their positive outlook and satisfaction with living conditions,

6. 'Living environment is good and comfortable.' (S. 8. F)
7. 'My life is what I thought. I have been accustomed to living here.' (S. 15/F)

Statement 7 'My life is what I thought...' is interesting because it indicates that the informant had expectations before she came to Singapore. Existing theories explain that

individual expectations have long been regarded as a crucial factor in the intercultural adjustment process, and that they are a function of the phenomenon of intercultural adjustment (Kim, 1988). They refer to the ‘anticipatory process and predictive outcome of the upcoming situation.’ (p. 240). Ward (1996) and Ward and Kennedy (1994) observed that realistic expectations promote intercultural adjustment, and ‘accuracy-based positive expectations’ (Kim, 1988: 240) ease adjustment stress. According to Kim, people with positive expectations tend to create a self-fulfilling prophesy in their successful adjustment; negative expectations may also produce the opposite effect. The student has adjusted because she has met her prior expectations of what life would be, and there is no obvious gap between the expectations and the present situation.

Other informants referred to more aspects of their adjustment, finding positive elements in Singapore as a country: developed, safe, beautiful and orderly,

7. ‘Singapore is more developed than China’ (S. 10/ M)
8. ‘ (Singapore) has safety, beauty and public order’ (S. 4/F)

Both statements summarise how they feel about living in a country where they can enjoy social, economic and political stability to help them settle in and adjust. Along similar lines, in another study by Torbiorn (1982), it was found that expatriates are generally more content in industrialized, economically developed countries.

Moreover, they see that, along with modernization, there are also opportunities offered to first-time overseas students,

9. ‘ Singapore is not perfect place to study in but good turning point for people when they go abroad for the first time.’ (S. 15/F)

Even though she feels that Singapore has not met all her expectations perfectly, it has other benefits to offer, such as a place of turning points or transitional point for first-time overseas students. Her open attitude helps her minimize resistance to change and maximize her inner capacity to turn the negative into positive, and find what is *best* in

potentially problematic situations. Once again, Kim's theory of open-minded strangers explains this student's belief.

The next statement is reminiscent of Oberg's (op.cit) theory of cultural shock, where strangers to a new culture pass through 4 stages, so that they begin to recover from the initial shocks given time,

10. ' Strange place, language and people when I first came. Gradually I adjusted and was happier than before.' ( S. 5/M)

Some observation notes based on the reflections of the researcher showed how this student became more adjusted to his new environment after settling in, and that 'strangeness' was no longer troubling him:

' 25<sup>th</sup> May, 2001: The 'strange' things he first encountered when he arrived refer to a few factors: the way local people speak both English and Chinese, the way locals regard them and misunderstand them, the different races and Chinese dialect groups that speak not only the common Mandarin among the groups but their own dialects with each other within the same dialect group. He was sometimes confounded by how locals speak to one another in a form of hybridized language, not Singlish but, as I found out, a mixture of different Chinese dialects and Malay. . He admitted it was strange but is quite funny to listen to.

The place was strange because the road, buildings and general geography of the country was not like anything he had seen ( he is from the north-eastern part of China) weather is so humid and it was not possible to go out at first as he always felt tired and hot. Most buildings were air-conditioned which made him fall sick.  
(Location: classroom; Time: 3.30pm; Informant: 1)

It is not surprising that this student finds many aspects of their new lives 'strange', as students usually face initial differences in concepts, language etc. However, there is a gap between what he felt on arrival and how he eventually felt, as he gradually became more

used to his new situation and happier as he coped with the challenges. The stage-wise theories of Oberg and Adler (1975) play a small role here and only to describe such stages but do not to help in understanding if all stages must be passed through before adjustment takes place, or if some can be skipped by some students.

Oberg's (op cit.) discussion of the first stage of culture shock includes the honeymoon stage where the initial reactions are those of euphoria, enthusiasm and fascination. Although Ward, Furnham and Bochner (2001) suggest that this needs further investigation, this 'entry euphoria' (p. 80) helps explain these informants' initial positive feelings. As the focus-group interview was conducted at the beginning of the study, or in the third week of their arrival, the students were cheerful and enthusiastic about their new environment and *cultural milieu*, where they had settled into a routine of following a timetable of lessons, meeting their new teachers, colleagues in their different classes, etc. Observation notes made at the time describe their mood and behaviour, but also includes the setting, location of interview, how it went and other feelings about the interview (i.e researcher's reflections).(See section 3.3, Field Notes about note taking ):

‘ April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2001: Notes taken on their moods and behaviour, topics discussed and particular features of this session

Once they had gathered into the room designated for this first interview session they started to settle in. Seemed to be arranging their own seating next to one another in groups of male, female, mixed gender, familiarity, roommates, classmates. I asked them to sit in a circle but logistically, it turned out to be clusters of students in a circular form.

They were chatty, some looked questioning. Two female informants came and asked me, before session what interview was about (although I had already explained to them!) and if it's for the school. I told them it was for my own research, and made mental note to address this point again when the session starts. There was even some joking about whether I served food and drink, and a suggestion that I conduct interviewing in a restaurant of their choice!

I felt that the interviewing was starting off on a good note: mood was jovial,

students were participatory (even the reticent ones were laughing), and a certain anticipation hung in the air.

I introduced the issue of research and made sure that everyone understood, using the Chinese word for research so that they understood and were clear about today's interview, talked about student adjustment when students go for study abroad and that I'll ask them questions regarding this. They were curious but some said they accepted it (which meant that they welcomed it!).

I began with questions more likely to be of interest to them more and decided to begin with section B in the Group Interview schedule (see Appendix 4) which dealt with social life outside school: their first impressions upon arrival, and factors that affect them, and in what way

Initial reactions/ responding was quiet, hushed, chattering in Chinese. I had to ask them again and tried to prompt by giving examples of areas to speak about: weather, people, local language, city, or anything that comes to mind. They started with the weather. (Recording of the interview should contain discussions on this topic.) I had to closely guide the discussions to the other areas of learning English and interaction with locals. In a week, I'll administer the Culture Shock questionnaire.'

(Location: Classroom; Time: 5pm; Duration: 60 minutes)

More notes taken outside the interview schedule were made based on observation and sporadic teacher/confidante chats; they revealed what the students do after school and how they spend their free time:

'27<sup>th</sup> April, 2001: 3 female students were chatting before start of their class (in the classroom). There are 10 minutes before class. Initially they talked about familiarising themselves with their new neighbourhood, going to the local shopping centre and comparing prices with those in China. They spoke with knowledge of the local transport (e.g. names of train stations, bus-stops and the fares of taxis). They also spoke about what they had seen the last weekend, the places they had seen: little India and heard that some other friends had gone to the



Malay Village. They also planned to go to Sentosa Island, and asked me if I had been there. X.W. mentioned her outing to Little Indian felt like she was in India and that maybe some of the Indians were not native Singaporeans. They were impressed by the gold shops displaying bright shiny gold and that in China, such shops would have been protected by security men and a lot of alarms. Her friend asked her if she had seen such shops there, and they started laughing.

My reflections: The female students tend to be more aware of their new cultural environment (or is it only this small group within the group?) and have taken time and effort to see the sights and seek out the new cultural elements. Will make a note in the interview schedule for the next focus group interview-session to ask if all have been to the different local ethnic areas: Relevance of this to my study is i. is there eagerness to learn about new cultures, ii. Have they deliberately exposed themselves to new cultures to learn to adjust to them?, iii. identify the ones who haven't made effort to see the sights.

(Location: classroom; Time: 1.50; Duration 10 minutes; Informants:18)

Outside the school, most of the students had spent time in their student lodgings or close by, familiarizing themselves with amenities (shops, transport services etc.) They had already visited various places of interest on the island, including the Malay and Indian parts of the city, tried out new foods, heard different Chinese dialects indigenous to the various dialect groups in Singapore as well as the ubiquitous Singlish. Initial observation thus tendered an emerging picture of enchantment and eagerness to adjust to the new environment, while being aware of the differences between their own homes and new residences. The following are some researcher-notes based on observations and some reflection on the informants' early stages of their sojourn:

27<sup>th</sup> April, 2001: The Culture Shock questionnaire by Mumford was administered to the informants. I told them this session was not an interview but I wanted to know if they had 'settled in' into their new environment. Most of them nodded and called out their answers that ranged from 'yes, very much!' to 'so-so'. I also asked if they had already been to see the local cultural areas, e.g Little India.

Most of them said they had not been there but had been to the Malay Village, Chinatown and Sentosa island. The ones who haven't been( I can only identify two) said that the weather didn't allow them to get around much and that it was too how.

My reflections: Most of them had seen at least one of the local cultural areas in Singapore but not all. This shows their interest in other cultures and want exposure to different elements of our multi-cultural country.

It's the early stage of their sojourn but does their enthusiasm mean they are more likely to adjust?

Such notes and reflections not only helped jog the researcher's memory but also supplement the data and provided more insight into the affective aspects of the overall living and language learning experiences in the new environment. Studies have shown the importance of such affective aspects in the language learning experiences of students abroad in new environments, and have included nesting patterns - the need to establish a suitable home in the host country and transition anxiety – anxiety caused by traveling to a foreign country to reside there (Schumann and Schumann, 1977), responses to the physical and social environment (Bailey, 1980), and even preference for a particular physical position in the classroom (Lowe, 1987). In the same way, these students described various aspects of their interests and needs with regard to their accommodations and environment with much cheer and enthusiasm, revealed in their behaviour during their description, as noted during data gathering:

4<sup>th</sup> May, 2001: This session was to probe for information on the factors that affect their adjustment. They seemed to focus more on their accommodations. I wonder if anyone had had a bad experience or is the group emphasis on this topic co-incident? I remember that some students reported they were unhappy about their accommodation before the interviews started. The same now comment how they deal with them but 8 of them are still unhappy.

Reflections: In this session, the positive-thinking students are reminiscing about their homes in China, and make constant comparison between Singapore and



China. They said it wasn't home (and defined 'home' as being their own individual houses in their towns, provinces) but have to tolerate them and be as positive as possible. Said they heard stories of accommodations being worse than theirs. One student said all he needed was a TV to watch and was lucky his landlord had one. These students who seemed more independent and resilient to problems of adjustment and tended to look at life more positively, even though they looked homesick sometimes. They talked about how much they yearned for home. (recording shows this)'

(Location: Classroom; Time 4.15pm; Duration 20 minutes; Informants: 16)

They often mentioned their own homes in China, and even the most independent students reminisced about their own rooms and showed longing for home. However, when they realized they were here to stay, for at least 6 months to a year, they focused more on the positive aspects in their circumstances: having TVs in their rooms, proximity to public transport, nice landladies. Such aspects gave them comfort, and although they found them strange it was also comfortable as they tolerate the unfamiliar while enjoying the other good aspects. Some notes taken at the time of interviews showed how the study-abroad experience has taught a student to appreciate his parents and home,

' 6<sup>th</sup> July, 2001: Y.M talks about his family: how his mother wakes up, makes breakfast, cooks favourite food, etc.. His father goes to the market to buy his favourite food. He appreciates all this now and didn't before. It's because he has never been abroad so long before and away from parents and home. Reflections: Picture emerges of how the experiences here for this student have taught him to appreciate his home. It's not so much one of homesickness but more appreciation of what he'd been lucky to have at home, with care and attention given to him by his parents. It somehow helps him adjust, knowing he'll go back home after his sojourn here. He tolerates the unfamiliar and the discomforts of his Singapore accommodation. This seems to be a helpful strategy for adjustment! I suppose each person has his own strategy to cope with a new life in a new place. Six more students also feel the same way and refer to the different

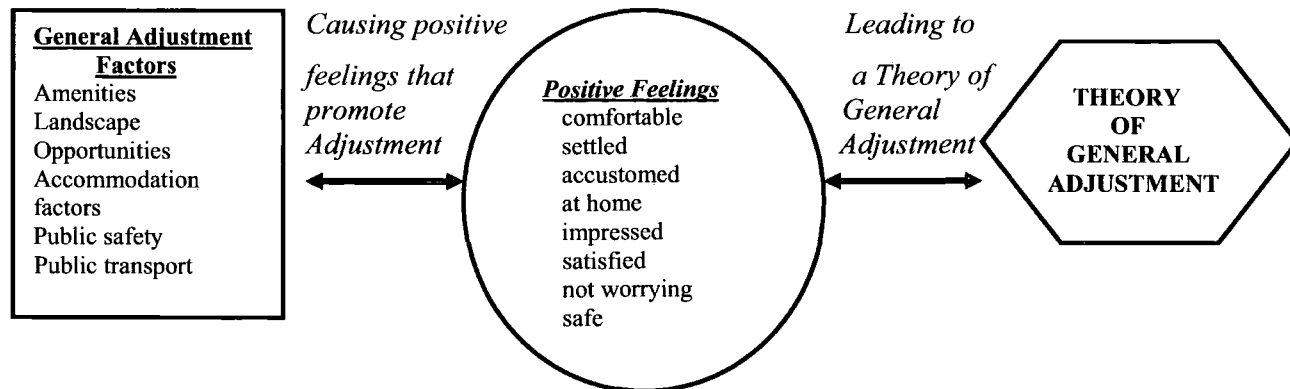
things their parents do for them.

(Location: Classroom; Time: 5.30; Duration 45 minutes; Informants: 15)

The underlying message from the informants' statements and notes based on both observation and reflection is that most of the students exhibit more willingness to adjust to their new accommodations and are more positive towards them because they feel they are here on a temporary basis. They report missing certain aspects, such as the material comforts, from their previous lives in China, e.g. 'I try not to think about other things I need because it's not my home...' in statement 1, section 4.6.1.1, and that there are still the emotional attachments to home and family. They deal with the 'strangeness' of the country, people and language by adopting a strategy that helps them cope with the pressure of settling into new accommodations; it is because they know they'll go home eventually to what is theirs, familiar, and which gives them a sense of security. In this sense, their adjustment is more effectively managed when they think more positively about it.

Summary: Factors that promote adjustment

The overall theory of general adjustment is abstracted from their beliefs that factors in their new environment help promote their adjustment. The students arrive in their new environment and have to face many new aspects of life that can be both stressful and pleasant. In this section, the positive encounters and experiences in their new environment are analysed and have led to the discovery of promoting factors of adjustment. In the analysis, such factors are linked to accommodations and general living conditions, and are identified as: amenities in their accommodations, other accommodation factors, public transport, similarity between their old and new homes, landscape, public safety and opportunities. Although this is a micro-level examination, such factors also reveal what are essentially important to them and give rise to their theory of adjustment to the new environment. They are also the reasons behind their positive feelings, such as being: comfortable, settled, satisfied, not worrying, accustomed, at home, impressed and secure.



**Fig. 4.1** Theory of General Adjustment: Promoting factors

Some examples of the above factors are drawn from previous pages to support and conclude their theory of general adjustment in this section:

E.g 1: with regard to feeling comfortable, because of having good amenities, such as TV set, their lives are more comfortable, ‘ I’m quite comfortable. I have TV...’ (S.5/M)

E.g.2: with regard to feeling safe, the students feel that public safety is important when they are in a new country. Being abroad and in unfamiliar settings can be frightening and worrying. However, in Singapore, they feel it is a safe place to live, “ (Singapore) has safety, beauty and public order’ (S. 4/F)

E.g.3: with regard to being satisfied, because of the proximity to public transport, used by the students for their commuting between school and home, the student is satisfied with the location of his accommodations, ‘My accommodations are close to the public transport’ (S. 12/M)

E.g.4: with regard to being impressed by the host country, all the students have good impressions of the way Singapore is modernized and well developed, ‘Singapore is more developed than China’ (S.10/M) The students feel that this promotes adjustment.

E.g.5: with regard to becoming accustomed, the student feels his expectations have been met and his adjustment is easier because of this fulfillment, 'My life is what I thought. I have been accustomed to living here.' (S. 15/F)

Previous research findings help inform the theory of adjustment of these students and play a part in explaining what conditions affect them most (e.g. having good amenities in their accommodations) and how these make them feel (e.g. 'comfortable'). While such research is relevant to this section, not all can explain the finding here. Furnham and Bochner (1982) explain that many foreign students face problems of adjustment and suffer culture shock; however, students in this section report that they are well adjusted to certain factors in their new environment.

However, other theories are consistent with the findings in this research. The psychological factors associated with their adjustment are cited by Kim (1988) to be psychological readiness to cope with difficulties and resilience against shocks as parts of the adjustive capacity of strangers. Such readiness is observed in statement 5, 'I think I can adjust to the new environment here. There must be difficulties but it will be fine'. With regard to expectations, theories by Ward (1996) and Ward and Kennedy (1994) explain that expectations are a function of the phenomenon of intercultural adjustment, and also Kim (1988) says that that positive expectations can ease adjustment stress. Both theories inform why students here have become accustomed to their new environment, as in statement 7, 'My life is what I thought. I have been accustomed to living here.' According to the stage-wise and culture shock theories of Oberg (1960) and Oberg and Adler (1975), cross-cultural sojourners go through phases of emotional reactions. This explains why student 5 says, 'Gradually I adjusted and was happier than before', indicating that adjustment can take place as a stage 'reflecting enjoyment of and functional competence in the new environments.' (in Ward, Furnham and Bochner, 2001:80). Torbiorn (1982) adapts the theory of adjustment to modernized countries, and says that expatriates are contented to be in industrialized and economically developed countries. This holds true for the students here because they find that 'Singapore is more developed than China' and adjust well to such modernized settings.

No new concepts seem to have emerged from this research but there are some data which are not accounted for by current theories. The findings have enabled the researcher to tie together some of the elements mentioned above and conclude that the students are able to adjust well to their new environment when the conditions are right, and these will promote their feeling of well-being and contentment. Consequently, while generalized fears about inability to adjust have been found to exist in other theories, good conditions went some way to reducing the potential for maladjustment.

Where there is evidence to support a theory of adjustment, there are also perceptions that reflect how difficult adjustment is for others.

4.6.1.2 Hindering factors: homesick, worried, restricted, disappointed, dissatisfied, stressed, unhappy, strained, insecure, vulnerable, disappointed and intolerant of certain factors

When the data were examined, some questions arose, 'What difficulties do they see as typically affecting their general adjustment?' Although a quarter of the group are satisfied with the new living and environmental conditions, the rest encounter problems with the same aspects, such as housing conditions, food and weather causing them to feel homesick, worried, restricted, disappointed, dissatisfied, stressed, unhappy, insecure, vulnerable, disappointed with and intolerant of certain conditions.

Problems experienced by students studying abroad are likely to vary depending on many factors (e.g. age, class level, cultural origins, extent of cultural similarity/dissimilarity etc.). Homesickness is one of the most frequent problems and sources of stress (Ward, Furnham & Bochner, 2001), and in this study, factors such as strange and unfamiliar surroundings cause their homesickness,

1. 'I see my bedroom here and I think my bedroom was very beautiful in China. I think about it all the time.' (S. 2/F)
2. 'I feel stressed every day. It (housing conditions) makes me unhappy...I don't

like to go home (to the accommodations) everyday.' ( S. 11/M)

Mintz (1956), in Gudykunst and Kim (2003), reports that prolonged exposure to an *ugly* room brings about reactions such as 'monotony, fatigue, headache, sleep, discontent, irritability, hostility and avoidance of the room' (p. 466). This is true for student 2 in statement 1, who is unhappy with her new accommodations and is homesick for her home in China, an aspect of the 'separation reactions' which Furnham and Bochner (1982:125) explains is a problem faced by many foreign students, together with homesickness which, according to Ward, Furnham & Bochner (2001), is one of the most significant concerns, together with money, coursework and language. Mintz (op.cit) further explains that exposure to a *beautiful* room, in contrast, brings about 'feelings of comfort, pleasure, enjoyment, importance, energy, and a desire to continue [the] activity' (p. 466), which explains why the student longs for her room in China. Mintz's remarks also explain why student 11 in statement 2, avoids going back to his accommodations. More statements from other students reflect their unhappy view of their accommodations:

3. ' Worried about housing conditions.' (S. 1/ F)
4. ' Unhappy about living conditions.' (S. 17/ F)
5. ' Accommodations are bad.' (S. 7/ M)

They were very concerned and almost distressed with housing conditions, and had worried about this factor of adjustment since they arrived. They had made similar remarks when they first *confided* in the researcher their dissatisfaction with their accommodation, even before the focus-group interviews started,

' April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2001: W. said he didn't like his accommodation because it was hot and cramped. It was unlike his own room back in China and .compares that the conditions here are really bad. I wonder if others feel the same but he was the only one to report this.

(Location: classroom; Time: 1.45pm)



Therefore, such remarks about their unhappy state of mind is not new to the researcher, with almost each one reporting a different sort of problem, ranging from difficult landlords to inadequate space in their rooms (more are cited below in No. 6). Moreover, it was not clear if the students were seeking help by mentioning their housing problems or just reporting their dissatisfaction (and it would not be appropriate to ask) but the researcher noted that they believed this particular stressful aspect not only affects them physically but is also a constant reminder of how difficult it is to adjust to their new homes.

According to research, worry about housing has always been a source of problems for student sojourners, as in this case. It is a life change and induces mental distress, like 'worry'. Furnham and Bochner (1982) have argued that foreign students confront problems associated with accommodations. The factor analysis inventory of Crano and Crano, (1993), named worry about housing as a conventional culture shock problem, and described it as ' precipitating significantly more strain than difficulties in other areas' (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001: 155). Both literature and this empirical evidence coincide on the theory that worry about housing conditions is strongly linked to adjustment.

Other students complain they are restricted because they have little freedom to enjoy certain activities from watching TV to cooking for themselves.

6. ' We can't watch TV with our landlords'; ' We have to turn off lights early';  
'Cannot cook' (S. 2/F; S. 9/M; S. 17/F)

Such experiences, although the minutiae of their daily life in Singapore, help build a more complete picture of how they feel, what they worry about and the effects of these feelings.

While the same group of students showed positive attitudes towards their accommodation in a previous interview, they now began to worry and think about them in negative light.

They were more excited and ready to adjust before, but after two months of their sojourn, began to feel the pressure of adjustment, and along with it some culture learning and the fulfillment of the basic need to feel at home and comfortable in new surroundings.

They also swing to a negative view in relation to the scenery. Although another in the group complimented Singapore on the 'beauty' of its scenery, the one below is disappointed because there is a lack of 'views',

7. 'I come from a big country and we have many nice scenery. No views here.' (S. 6/M)

The new environment affects one student positively (statement 8 in section 4.5.1) with the student praising the scenery as beautiful, while the student in this section is disappointed with it. This is explained by Ward, Bochner and Furnham (2001), who maintain that 'individuals process stress-related information in a variety of ways' (p. 75), due to differences in expectations and culture, where it is possible for one individual preferring a 'positive reinterpretation' of his situation (p.77), and the other a negative one. The difference in perceptions here is more related to expectations than culture because both students are from the same cultural background, with one student disappointed because he expects more from his surroundings, and the other being contented with what she finds in it.

There are many facets of the new environment that are unfamiliar to these students. The following statement highlights the significance of life changes to the student during his intercultural sojourn, the appraisal of these changes and the coping strategies he adopts to deal with them,

8. 'For me just small differences in our life, some difference in our lives between the Chinese and Singaporeans. First, it's about traffic problem. When I go in the street, I see some different customs. And also it's different with the way people walk. In China, they walk along the right side. But in Singapore way, they would

walk on the left side. It is a problem because according to the old custom, I will walk on the right side. Of course, it's very dangerous. So, it's really a problem to adjust to these customs; they are from the environment. And also, some Chinese like to speak loudly, even maybe in public places and comparing to Singaporeans, they speak loud. It's a different custom. In Singapore, some people do...only in buses and (some) public places that are small. Because our motherland China is large (laughter) (S.5/M)

Observation and interview notes:

‘ 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2001: A. contributes the most on his adjustment, but his remarks are surprising and offer fresh look at the kinds of factors that concern PR China people in Singapore. He seems to experience adjustment to his new environment in a different way but it's possible he simply has more to say about it or is more observant, or both. Typically makes comparisons between Singaporean customs and those in China, like the other informants. But he gives a fresh look because of the points of comparison: road rules, pedestrian habits, how people speak in public.

Reflections: After 5 months, he seems more reflexive, as though he's coming to grips with realities of life in a foreign country. Detailed description of those factors denotes pre-occupation with such life changes, as though he has subjected himself to a wider variety of stressors upon entry into a new cultural milieu than others in his group. It seems with so many cultural similarities between Singapore and China, there are many insidious aspects that we, as hosts, are not aware that foreigners face, especially students who need to stay for a length of time. . He is happy in the way he copes with the various new facets of his daily life, and tries to cope with humour. ’

(Location: park; Time: 4.30pm; Duration 60 minutes; Informants: 16)

These factors ‘from the environment’ (line 7) are salient life events that affect acculturation processes. According to research by Zwingman and Gunn (1983), sojourner students go through the ‘uprooting disorder’, where some of the conditions of culture

shock include general cultural dissimilarities in customs, rhythm of life, and so forth. According to Furnham and Bochner (1986), culture shock entails ‘ a series of stress-provoking life changes which tax adjustive resources and necessitate coping responses.’ (p. 73). Here, the student believes the different customary road rules is a life change that poses not only an adjustment problem but also a risk to his personal safety. His coping response is to change to adjust to the new pedestrian customs, although it is a struggle for him to forget the old and remember the new.

His comments about Singaporeans speaking more softly in general than the PRC Chinese are difficult to interpret as positive or negative although it is clear that he acknowledges the speaking ‘customs’ between the two countries to be different. Babiker *et al*’s (1980) hypothesis about the link between cultural distance and psychological well-being explains why the student mentions this difference in relation to his adjustment, and why it is confusing to him. He ends his statement with some laughter, possibly because it’s part of a way of coping with his adjustment. This ‘coping humour’ is explained as ‘psychological adjustment with lower levels of depression’ (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001: 78). What is interesting about this student’s theory of adjustment is that he starts out talking about ‘differences’ between the Chinese and the Singaporeans, and then continues more insistently that they are ‘problems’ in referring to the pedestrian rules on the road, leaving him feeling vulnerable and even concerned with his road safety. Once again, this allows a glimpse into the world of the sojourner student and its diverse facets that make up their beliefs and theory of adjustment.

The students go through many life changes in their new environment, and a change in dietary habits is one of them. They are worried about adjusting to life here because they don’t like the food as the tastes are unfamiliar,

9. ‘ I don’t like spicy hot food, especially curry. Not used to it.’ ( S. 9/M)
10. ‘ Many difference in food.’ ( S. 3/ F)

In Crano and Crano's 1993 Research Inventory Instrument, dietary concerns and differences in food represent a strain for international students. When asked if they felt strained by this problem, these informants answered that they had even lost weight..

11. ' I'm very thin now. I didn't like it (the food) in the beginning and I didn't grow to like it. That's why I don't eat in those places. I prefer not to eat ...sometimes, and it is reason I become like this thin.' ( S. 9/M)

The informant was visibly concerned about his weight loss and blames it on his aversion to new foods. However, it seems that the student, and those in statements 9 and 10, select food that are non-Chinese and very different to their own; as local food is predominantly Chinese and can be found at most food centers, which they would have found more familiar than some spicy dishes indigenous to the other ethnic groups in Singapore. Some notes were made during the interview

' 2<sup>nd</sup> November, 2001: The topic of food and their pre-occupation show it hinders their adjustment. For some, the food is too spicy and not as good as China's (still the tendency to compare) But they describe either Malay or Indian food, or food known to be spicy and native to Singaporean cuisine. Eating at places that sell typical Chinese food would have helped them They had assumed since Singapore's population is predominantly 75% Chinese, they wouldn't need to adjust to new foods and cuisines that disagreed with them but their expectations of cultural similarity turned out to be, as they learned, quite inaccurate. A student complains he is so affected that he has lost weight. Although two students have grown accustomed, most of them are still averse to it.

Reflections: Literature (Ward, F&B, 2001) supports that problems experienced by students depend on type of student sample and cultural origins, i.e. cultural and linguistic similarity. Not applicable to large extent here because, despite cultural similarity, there are still factors that hinder adjustment, such as food. (Location: classroom; Time: 5.30pm; Duration: 60 minutes; Informants: 17)

Such culture-specific aspects of sojourning, according to Ward, Furnham and Bochner (2001) are typical of the wide range of problems experienced by international students. Crano and Crano's research show that the problems associated with conventional culture shock issues, such as dietary concerns and differences in food, were reported as precipitating more strain than in other areas, and this could be caused by cultural distance (Furnham and Bochner, 1982). However, this is not the case here as there are many cultural similarities.

The concern with food therefore cannot be underestimated because it is an obvious cause of worry for students who have to adjust to many new facets of life. Research shows that the view of food in the host country is a function of time spent there, and that not all sojourners start off in the phase of supposed adjustment and optimism (Torbiorn , 1982). Spradley and Phillips (1972) developed the Cultural Readjustment Rating Scale and identified 'Type of food eaten' as one of the 33 life changes associated with cultural transition; their study sampled Chinese students in the US as one of the groups in their study. Also, Holmes and Rahe's (1967) Social Readjustment Rating Scale, is used to determine the magnitude of recent life events, including the 'change in dietary habits'. A recent research by Pearson-Evans (2006) shows that alimentary differences exacerbate adjustment for her respondents in Japan, but the differences, as evidenced in her research, could also be an exciting novelty. This is clearly not the case in this study as all the students cannot tolerate the food, finding it too 'different' to their own.

The concern with weather and the adjustment to it are difficulties typically experienced by the PRC students. They find it hard to tolerate the 'hot' weather, to the extent that it affects their health,

12. ' Weather is problematic. It's too hot all the time. Everyone thinks so. We think it's not so easy to be here' (S. 13/F)
13. ' Can't accept weather. Yes, I'm agree with her about this. Foreigners hate it, I think, because it's not easy to accept. In this...group...he, she and all of us

(pointing to four students including himself), we feel it's not a good place because it's hot and we can't accept it' (S. 11/M)

14. 'Worried about being able to adjust to weather. I still can't. Maybe never...'

(S. 7/ M)

15. 'I didn't adjust because it's very hot and small' (S. 14/M)

16. 'Weather gives me headache...can't concentrate in school.' (S. 6/M)

The remarks indicate they are strained by the effects of the weather, that it is something hard to 'accept', a source of 'worry', a cause for 'headaches' and a reason for lack of 'concentration in school'. From the above reflections, the students do not feel they've had enough time to adjust to the continual and constant sub-tropic heat and humidity typical of the region's climate. Such discomforts affect their health and are such a preoccupation that it affects their performance in school. They also add that,

17. 'Most problematic is getting used to the directions. Where is north, south? It's a problem for new comers.' (S. 18/F)

18. 'No season change. There's sunlight disorientation...I mean maybe I am...(disoriented) When you have the season change, you can know about when is sunrise...about what time, I mean. If winter, the sun appearing early, and is different to summertime. So I have disorientation' (S. 15/F)

In statement 17, the student acknowledges that she is disoriented because she cannot identify directions, which is important to her to give her a sense of orientation and knowing where she is. Perhaps this is related to a foreigner's need to have a feel for the place she is in, such as a sense of its history or culture. It is more so for a student who has to stay in a new country for an extended length of time and therefore needs to be adjusted to all facets of the environment, including its weather. In this case, the differences in climate between China and Singapore are so wide that adjustment is understandably difficult and strenuous. Both statements 17 and 18 about directions and climate

summarise their concern with such factors and why such it impedes adjustment to the new environment.

It is noted that the students' reflections show this inability to adjust to the weather is due to their being unaware that it can be so different to their own climate; it seems they had not expected it to be so debilitating and one of the problems of adjustment. Other researchers, for example, Furnham and Bochner (1982) did much work on cross-cultural transition and social difficulty, extending it to a wider perspective in their Sociocultural Adaptation Scale to include adaptive skills to a new environment, such as 'dealing with the climate' (Ward, Furnham and Bochner, 2001: 66). The fact that research has incorporated this component of transition difficulty indicates it is a recognized cause of adjustment problems.

Therefore, from their persistent complaints about the heat, directions and lack of seasons, it is evident that weather is one of the stressors that affect their psychological (e.g. worry) and physical health (e.g. headaches, lack of concentration – possibly a psychosomatic effect) to the new environment and clearly underpins their theory of adjustment. This weather intolerance is explained to be a source of distress in Babiker *et al*'s 1980 Culture Distance Index which lists climate as the first item, and which is correlated to anxiety among students in a new culture. Another research that links the environment to psychological stress is that of Zwingmann and Gunn (1983) that indicates climate as an 'inevitable problem' that causes psychological stress.

It is useful in understanding their theory of adjustment to look at what stresses the students. This stress approach, Ward, Bochner and Furnham (op.cit) explain, helps in 'understanding and interpreting the acculturative experience' because it recognizes that such factors affecting cross-cultural adjustment are part of the vast array of changes confronted by sojourners and considered as cultural-specific aspects of student sojourning.



### Summary: Factors that hinder adjustment

In this section, several common feelings shared by the students hinder adjustment: homesick, worried, dissatisfied, stressed, unhappy, insecure, vulnerable, unfamiliar and intolerant of certain conditions, and these feelings stem from several factors in general adjustment related to living conditions, food, weather and other factors. The following examples recap their feelings that affect adjustment:

E.g. 1 With regard to feeling homesick, this student is experiencing a difficulty common to other cross-cultural travelers, 'I see my bedroom here and I think my bedroom was very beautiful in China. I think about it all the time.' (S. 2/F)

E.g. 2 With regard to feeling worried, the student is troubled by her housing conditions, one of the main sources of worry for sojourner students, 'Accommodations are bad' (S.7/M)

E.g. 3 With regard to feeling vulnerable, the student feels the unfamiliar rules for pedestrians on the roads in Singapore threaten his safety, 'It is a problem because according to the old custom, I will walk on the right side. Of course, it's very dangerous.' (S. 5/M)

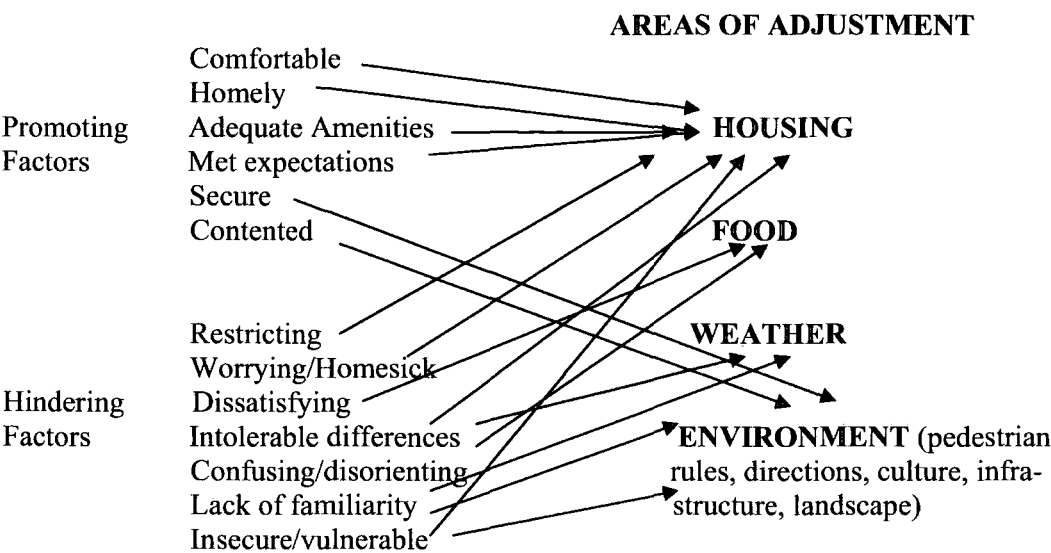
E.g. 4. With regard to feeling stressed, the student finds it hard to cope with his accommodations, 'I feel stressed every day. It (housing conditions) makes me unhappy...I don't like to go home (to the accommodations) everyday.' (S. 11/M)

E.g. 5. With regard to being intolerant, the student finds the weather hard to endure, 'Can't accept weather' and 'Worried about being able to adjust to weather. I still can't. Maybe never...' (S. 7/M)

#### a. Scheme

In the present theory of general adjustment derived from the informants, perceptions ranging from local housing to food raise new concepts as they are embedded in the context of Singapore and also, since they are areas of direct relevance to the daily

functioning of the informants, affect how they view them as promoting or hindering to their adjustment here. Below is a general scheme of promoting and hindering factors.



**Fig. 4.2** Promoting and hindering factors in General Adjustment

b. Similarity and difference with existing theories

Specific facets of general adjustment such as housing, food, weather and other environmental factors are realities that are faced by the students on their study sojourn in Singapore. Their theories as outcomes generally confirm the relevance of those factors indicated in previous studies and are particularly consistent with those from Black and his colleagues (1989-1991), Ward and colleagues (1991-1999), Kim (1988) and others in the past two decades, that have dealt with the adjustment of students studying abroad; such studies indicate that there are distinct facets of adjustment in student sojourns, and can be subsumed within sociocultural adjustment. Crano and Crano’s 1993 factor analysis of items representing personal strain for international students, for example, yielded problems in dietary differences, health matters and accommodation as relevant to them.

Kim’s cross-cultural theory explains that the demands of sojourning experiences compel sojourners to ‘adjust and readjust themselves to better function in the host society’ (1988:

54). The students' theories on living and adjusting in Singapore are consistent with that of Kim who explains why strangers are often under stress during such adjustive processes. This can bring out tendencies to become defensive or even hostile towards the country, and in this study, these include the attacking of its food, climate and also the overly concern with details such as differences in pedestrian behaviour between China and Singapore, or even disorientation due to the climate. The informants perceive that their adjustment experiences involve having to understand and cope with the new environmental characteristics that deviate from what they assume, take for granted and with which they are familiar in their own country. Such stress, according to Kim's model of stress-adjustment-growth dynamics, occurring during the coping is not only responsible for anxiety, frustration and suffering, but also for adjustive growth, such as 'the learning and creative responses to manage new cultural circumstances' (1988: 56). Although they were perplexed and dissatisfied with many aspects of housing, food, weather and environmental factors, the informants also learned to respond by adopting attitudes that helped them adjust to the host environment.

However, what is different here is there is residual resistance and defensive reactions against the changes in their life events, and the 'growth over time' in Kim's theory does not necessarily take place in all sojourning situations. She acknowledges this and points out that not all individuals are equally successful in making transitions toward adjustment and that the cycle of growth can be very difficult.

The four areas of general adjustment also provide a rich source of theory and data with which to understand culture shock from the perspectives of the informants. Furnham and Bochner (1986) suggest that culture shock is the result of negative life-event or changes in routine patterns of behaviour or living. This is true in the case of these informants, whose theory lies in the belief that those four factors are important to their adjustment. What hinders a smooth and easy adjustment by these informants are factors typical in most cases of intercultural adjustment to a new environment, as exposure to culture change, social change, environmental changes may lead to anxiety and stress (Furnham and Bochner, 1986). Researchers in previous quantitative studies, such as Holmes and

Rahe (1967), have also worked on developing normative scores or weights for each life-event (such as change in eating habits) but there have been problems with using an objective group mean. This is because individuals differ in the extent to which life-events cause them stress. As in this study, the informants do not agree homogeneously on the factors of general adjustment, and although, to some extent, all the participants are forced into cross-cultural encounters based on their decision to go abroad to study, they too construct differing theories about their intercultural experiences.

Mainly, it can be said in this section that, while a quarter of the respondents have adjusted to general adjustment factors, the rest continue to have ongoing problems and stress. These problems of conventional shock issues related to weather, food, accommodation etc. are reported by them to precipitate more strain than in other areas.

#### 4.6.2 Interaction adjustment

To begin with, intercultural contact needs to be defined: it occurs when ‘ a person from one society travels to another country with a particular objective in mind: for example, to work, play, study, exploit, convert, or provide assistance’ (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001:5), where he or she might face new challenges associated with living in the new environment. Interaction adjustment is one of those challenges and, according to Parker and McEvoy (1993), it involves ‘dealing with people from differing cultures (...including adjustment to socializing and speaking with host country nationals...)’ (p. 357). Bochner, McLeod and Lin (1977) defines it as the extent to which sojourners interact with and engage in the host culture.

According to Brislin (1981) it is generally accepted that interaction in intercultural contact can promote good will and understanding between members of two different cultures. However, it can also be problematic, as the contact can be difficult and often stressful between culturally disparate individuals (Ward, 1996). Therefore, interaction adjustment is not without its problems and as such may lead to adverse consequences of failing to adjust to the new culture.

This section deals with the intercultural interaction and also the interaction adjustment of the PR China students in Singapore. Many theories, in particular theories of stress and coping, have considered sojourner interactions with host nationals and focused specifically on the quality and quantity of interpersonal encounters involved in these interactions. According to Duck et al. (1991), the quality of communication refers to the extent to which communication is relaxed, smooth, involving understanding and minimal communication breakdown. An examination of their statements on interaction with locals reveals how the students define the quality of their own intercultural interactions, and to what extent it affects adjustment. The quantity refers to how much meaningful useful interaction they have with locals and also interaction opportunities. From their perspective, the study will be able to see how they perceive the interaction potential in their situations, which is defined as 'the degree of opportunity provided to strangers by the immediate and social environment' (Kim, 1976, 1977a; Kim, Lujan and Dixon, 1998, in Gudykunst and Kim, 2003: 370). Such a factor may also affect adjustment to the new environment.

As a language learner, the student has to take into account his/her ability to use the language in many social contexts in the new environment, not just completing school work or having grammatical knowledge. A student theorises on adjustment to her new environment, 'We must learn more English, and also about Singapore culture as we live here...you can't teach it from books..(You can) From social...from life. If you talk to them (locals), then maybe you learn about it (culture). Then your life can be easier.' (S. 15/F) The ability to acquire this competence is then in a sense an 'intercultural communicative competence' (Kim, 2001:98)) or knowledge of '*savoirs*' (Byram, 1995:54) that emphasize the cultural phenomena – meanings, beliefs, attitudes etc. that provide the informational, cultural and to a certain extent, linguistic, support for their functioning in the new environment.

Although the informants in this study know that English is not given the status of native language in Singapore, they choose to study here because they believe it to have a better standard than in China. Their expectations are expressed,

1. 'We heard it has good environment to learn English.' (S. 1/F)
2. 'Coming to learn *correct* English as it can be different to China's English.' (S. 8/F)

Those expectations show they themselves are keenly aware of the vital role that interaction in the target language plays in their overall functioning in the host environment, and all the students consider the 'pull' factor (Ting-Toomey, 1999: 240) to be Singapore's strong English language school programmes and learning environment for English interaction. They came to study English in Singapore as they believed it had a predominantly English-speaking environment and English-based interaction would help them not only improve their language but adjust better to their new environment. The new culture's attractions such as a perceived 'correct' English and 'good (English) environment' include better chances, for them, for personal linguistic advancement and more interaction opportunities than in China.

The quality and quantity of meaningful useful interaction are prominently reflected in their responses in the interviews, and threw up some questions: 'What do the students perceive as interaction?' 'What do they feel about the language used in their encounters with locals?' and 'Do they feel that frequent interaction leads to adjustment?' The answers lead to a theory of interaction adjustment that indicates what satisfies and dissatisfies them as to the amount of interaction and the standard of English used.

#### 4.6.2.1 Perceptions of the quality of interaction experiences

Responses to the question 'What do students perceive as interaction?' are as follows,

3. 'They (Singaporeans) can speak many languages. But sometimes they put words

together that sound strange and pronunciation is difficult to understand. I still talk with them in English' (S. 15/F)

4. 'I speak with local people to make friends.' (S. 5/M)
5. '(Singapore) isn't good English environment. Not many chances to speak English.' (S. 11/M)
6. 'My English isn't so good. I can speak Chinese to communicate my desires.' (S. 16/F)
7. 'I like to interact with locals.' (S. 8/F)

The students' definition of interaction is revealed, although not explicitly (the researcher did not ask for a specific definition of interaction) through words such as 'speak', 'talk', 'interact' and 'communicate'. These words show they understand that it is a verbal engagement and an interpersonal communication between themselves and others, and in this case, Singaporeans.

The next question, 'What do they feel about the language used in their encounters with locals?' seeks to understand how they feel about the interaction and communication and whether they are valuable and beneficial to them. The answers are:

8. 'Don't understand pronunciation of English (in Singapore).' (S. 7/M)  
Interview notes: not frequent. Finds it hard to adjust to the interaction as pronunciation is hindrance.
9. 'Not often. I only talk with Singaporeans when I need something. (S. 3/F)
10. 'Can't understand what Singaporeans say.' (S. 11/M)  
Interview notes: he refers to accent and Singlish; pidginized Singapore English
11. 'I don't like Singapore way of speaking, both English and Chinese. This is problem for me. Can't adjust to it. (S. 16/M)

6<sup>th</sup> July 2001: Y. speaks vehemently about the way people speak in Singapore. It hinders his learning and discourages him from practicing with locals. His daily

interaction is with people in his present home, in public places and sometimes with young Singaporeans playing basketball in his neighbourhood. He finds the accent and local lingo hard to understand; says it sounds like a mixture of different languages, two other informants sitting next to him complain of the same difficulty. They are concerned this leads to lack of practice and therefore lack of progress.

Reflections: Apart from one of the informants interacting, through sports games, with hosts, there seems little contact with them, and even less opportunities to practice. They have not formed close friendships with them nor seem to have host friends. So, interaction and practice kept to minimum. But problem is they find the locals hard to understand because they believe the languages: English and Chinese are not of the standard they expected and wish for communication, language development (English) and for socializing.

(Location: Classroom; Time 5.30; Duration: 45 Minutes; Informants: 15)

It is known generally that student sojourners experience a range of difficulties that are common to other cross-cultural travelers, and insufficient linguistic and cultural skills are some of them (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001) As the codes and meanings of the local English have not been learned and internalized, the students find it hard to overcome interaction dynamics with host nationals due to their lack of familiarity with the local form of English used by those with whom they are in contact. By not 'liking' and finding it 'difficult to understand' they realise that they lack ways of hearing, understanding and responding to their host nationals appropriately and effectively. Their theory of language differences also extends to the Mandarin language, ' They (Chinese Singaporeans) look Chinese but don't speak like Chinese', 'Most Singaporeans have accents, even in Chinese language', and 'Singaporeans can't understand deep language of China'.

The dissatisfaction with the quality of interaction-language is definitely emerging, and also shows that they perceive meaningful instrumental interaction ('when I need something') as an important component of interaction adjustment. In fact, interaction has often been used to measure intercultural competence (Ward, 1996). The students do not



believe it is their lack of linguistic ability that hampers interaction adjustment but rather the local accents. What they seek, as shown, are some key constituents of host communication competence that serve as instrumental, interpretive and expressive means of enabling them to interact meaningfully in the English language,

12. ‘ It’s difficult to interact with Singaporeans because they don’t understand me and I don’t understand them. But I start conversations with locals, not Chinese, but Indians sometime...they speak better English.’ (S. 16/M)

6<sup>th</sup> July 2001: They are almost insistent that Indians in Singapore speak better English. There is wide consensus on this with most of the group nodding their agreement. They said their accent is clearer and they used better words. A picture forms of their views on spoken English in Singapore: they expected most Singaporeans would speak better (clearer accent and better grammar) and are disappointed. So, their own interaction is hampered. Their belief is that most Indian Singaporeans speak better than the Chinese. As they feel culturally closer to the Chinese Singaporeans, they don’t find opportunities to forge closer ties with the Indians, and they believe this lack of communication and interaction accounts for the problems linked to their not adjusting.

(Location: classroom; Time: 5.30pm; Duration: 45 minutes; Informants: 15)

When this student refers to ‘Singaporeans’, he is talking about the Chinese; it is his view, therefore, that Indian Singaporeans speak better English than the Chinese here and this would encourage more contact with the Indians. Student 16’s perception is not inconsistent with that which views learning the host language as acquiring not only the linguistic codes (Kim, 1988), but also particularly of slang, idiom and metaphors that are highly contextual to Singapore, (indicated in statement 3, ‘... they put words together that sound strange and pronunciation is difficult to understand.’) Not knowing these codes would be a continuous frustrating experience for them (statement 11).

#### 4.6.2.2 Student theories on the quality of their interaction

So far, there is clear motivation for interaction, indicating they are eager to improve their English. However, they believe there are significant hindrances to their learning due, not to limited language skills but the ‘strange’ (statement 3) pronunciation of Singaporeans when they speak English, or even Mandarin Chinese (statement 11), and most believe this impedes their linguistic improvement, as opposed to perceptions upheld by Ward, Bochner and Furnham (2001) who suggest that international students perceive limited language skills as the most significant source of their academic problems. The informants show that they have relatively negative attitudes towards the spoken form of Singapore English from the local Chinese, and are quite explicit about how much better Indians speak here.

Little effort in the past has been made to examine Singapore English from the perspectives of international students, and since they may not know about the ‘high and low varieties of Singapore English’ (Young, 2003) that distinguishes the different types of English used in Singapore, their attitudes towards the English used in Singapore may be negatively affected. Their theories are consistent with those from Young’s research where her informants disagreed strongly with the statement ‘English spoken by Singaporeans is easy to understand’ (2003:101), and another that implied that her informants had negative attitudes only towards the spoken local English. What is not present in that study is any reference to distinctive ways of Chinese and non-Chinese speakers of Singapore English, as in this study.

What affects their academic performance also affects their adjustment, to the extent that the cause and effect would be worrisome and even result in their leaving Singapore, ‘(I am) worried about not learning English because...how to practice my speaking skill. It is very weak’, and ‘If I don’t learn English, I will go home (to China). I can’t live here anymore.’ Their feeling toward poor local spoken English impedes them from using their speaking skills and also their adjustment.

#### 4.6.2.3 Perceptions of the quantity of interaction

The following statements can answer the question, ‘Do they feel that frequent interaction leads to adjustment?’

13. ‘ We must learn more English, and also about Singapore culture as we live here...you can’t teach it from books..(You can) From social...from life. If you talk to them (locals), then maybe you learn about it (culture). Then your life can be easier’ (S. 15/F)
14. ‘English-speaking environment like Singapore is better than in China. I can practice all the time for learning. But one day (if) I can’t improve myself, I’ll leave...that’s my opinion. Maybe (it’s) not good for my studying to have these ideas. (Living) here with not good...poor English is difficult.’ (S. 4/F)
15. ‘ I speak more...often with the local people. I can practice my English. It can be good environment to live and study.’ (S. 12/M)

Interview notes: good environment is a conducive environment for frequent practice and interaction with locals

15<sup>th</sup> September 2001: there are a few who have found opportunities to interact more and frequently with locals. They seem to be more independent and more garrulous than the others (personality differences). They seem to have better speaking skills and are the more capable students in my class, scoring well regularly in their tests. Their belief is that Singapore offers opportunities for language practice, and for them, it is good environment as it’s conducive for frequent practice and interaction with locals.

Reflections: For these enthusiastic and positive-thinking students, their process of adjusting to new and unfamiliar culture is a journey of personal change and willingness to change and adapt. Student A (S. 15/F) cultivates an inroad into another culture by learning it from locals and finding it within the host community. This seems, for all three students, a positive theory of adjustment (Location: classromm; Time: 5.30pm; Duration: 45 minutes; Informants: 15)

In statement 13, the student links language learning with cultural learning in terms of the culture she would pick up when she communicates with locals in the target language. This is explained by Ting-Toomey's theory that 'newcomers' cultural knowledge and interaction based knowledge about the host culture serves as another critical factor in their adaptation process' (p. 240). According to her, such cultural knowledge can include information on cultural and ethnic diversity, history, geography, political and economic systems, and interaction-based knowledge can include language, verbal and non-verbal styles etc. Statements 14 and 15 also reflect positive and optimistic views on interaction in the new environment, with the students hoping to improve their language skills by having more practice with locals and which would help them adjust to the environment. Fluency in the host culture's language, explain Ward and Kennedy (1993), has been found to have a direct impact on sociocultural adaptation, and also developing relationships with members of the host culture

So far, there is a split of views on the quantity and quality of English-based interaction between those students in statements 8 to 12, and statements 13 to 15. Statements 8 to 12 indicate they believe that local accents, pronunciation and Singlish hinder interaction. Existing theory explains that understanding in cross-cultural contexts is hard to achieve as people bring differing backgrounds, needs and values to the communication setting (Ting-Toomey, 1999). Since the informants are not familiar with the background, variety and characteristics of Singlish and also the way it is used in everyday life, they find their interaction needs and values are under-met by this problem and therefore hard to adjust. Statements 13 to 15, and even 12 show the students have found ways to interact for the purposes of language improvement and cultural learning. To explain the differing views, it is possible some students have certain personality attributes that have been found to be 'consistently related to positive psychological functioning in a new culture' (Ting-Toomey, 1999: 241), such as an internal locus of control (i.e. inner-directed drives and motivations; Ward and Kennedy, 1993), and personality flexibility and openness (Kim, 1988; 1995). Another study by Yum (1986) also indicates a positive relationship between immigrants' internal locus of control (tendency to place the responsibility for events in

themselves) and the extent of host national development. This group therefore is motivated by their own individual desire to communicate with others, finding ways to acquire the skills to achieve sufficient and effective communication.

The following statements show that students with intellectual and social curiosity are more proactive in their effort to gain language competence. They believe that more interaction leads to more cultural knowledge, wider friendship networks and opportunities for language practice:

16. 'I have to try to approach local people. They are important to give you information about local culture. And you can practice your English. Some brought me around (Singapore).' (S. 15/F)
17. 'I like to know about the way people think about different issues. I have to talk to them if I want to know. It's my personality. I have many local friends' (S. 8/F)

What is seen from statements 8 to 17 is that the students generally want and need intercultural contact, but the ability and willingness to interact meaningfully with host nationals are largely dependent on their willingness to initiate interaction. Although personality attributes theory may throw light on why some students make more effort for interaction, it is from the researcher's point of view. However, statement 17 indicates that the student has considered it is her personality that helps her build friendship with local people.

Moreover, both statements 16 and 17 support the theory that sojourner-host interactions can provide functional benefits whether they occur in formal (e.g. school) or informal (other social settings) circumstances. Research by Abe, Talbot and Geelhoed (1998) has shown that international students who participate in structured peer-programs demonstrate better social adjustment than those who do not. These data show that unstructured activities also, such as non-academic interactions, are seen to have the capacity to promote interaction adjustment and according to the theory of these informants, if there is 'good' environment for interaction with locals. Moreover, such

bonds of interaction between these sojourners and their 'significant host nationals', which Furnham and Bochner (1982) call 'bi-cultural networks' (p. 173) could only function to facilitate their academic aspiration, as there is strong indication that the students for their part are seeking out host nationals for utilitarian purposes. More on this is research by Klineberg and Hull (1979) and Morris (1970) show there is a high degree of correlation between those students' high scores on measures of interaction with host nationals and their reports of satisfaction with their international experience

The following statements reinforce their view that they would not be able to learn much English if there are not enough opportunities for meaningful and beneficial interaction in the target language, a worrying situation that may even result in their returning home, as seen in statements 18 and 19. Bochner and Alibhai's (1985) study confirms this view of foreign students, after having experienced limited contact with host nationals, returning home disgruntled with the society in which they had studied. As they believe there are not enough opportunities for interaction, statement 18 shows the student relies on what Furnham and Bochner calls a 'mono-cultural network' (p. 173) for interaction, which usually consists of close friendships with other sojourning compatriots, and those exchanges will probably always be in their own language. It is these statements that show they perceive interaction adjustment as important to their goal of achieving academic success as well as overall adjustment to Singapore:

18. '(I am) worried about not learning English because...how to practice my speaking skill. It is very weak. I only speak to PRC people.' (S. 1/F)
19. ' Learning in school isn't enough. We only do exercise in coursework. No opportunities outside. If I don't learn English, I will go home (to China). I can't live here anymore.' (S. 14/M)  
Interview Notes: student refers to speaking opportunities.
20. ' If I know more English, I can communicate my desires. When I cannot, it's difficult.' (S. 4/F)

Statement 20 shows the student yearns for more linguistic skills. Therefore some hindering factors associated with interaction in the statements are lack of practice, of linguistic knowledge (statements 18 and 20), and of interaction opportunities outside school (statement 19). The following remaining statements all echo the above three statements, in particular 19, that the students are dissatisfied and attribute the situation to lack of opportunities.

21 'Not good language opportunities.' (S.9/M)

22 'Not many chances to speak English in Singapore.' (S. 11/B)

23 'Interaction only in the classroom. Not outside. And I don't have local friends for practice.' (S. 17/G)

Research (Richardson, 1974) has shown that there is a difference in the friendship patterns of satisfied, as opposed to dissatisfied, sojourners having more co-national and more host-national friends. Each statement above expresses lack of interaction between the informants and host nationals. 'Language opportunities' in statement 21 and 'not many chances' in number 22 both resonate with the wish to have interaction opportunities to improve language skills, and that host nationals in the form of 'local friends', in statements 17 and 23, are preferred for tangible, instrumental assistance. Bochner et al (1977) explain that sojourners need to form bonds with their 'significant host nationals' (in Furnham and Bochner, 1986: 128), so as to instrumentally facilitate the academic ambitions of the sojourner. Statement 23 shows the student yearning for friendship and acquaintanceship outside the school, for perhaps companionship for recreational and non-task oriented activities, and opportunities to practice English.

#### 4.6.2.4 Student theories on the quantity of interaction

One theory of their adjustment showed some students did not seem to reject local English, or the low-variety that is used commonly for communication, although others in the group disapprove of it and consider it difficult to understand. In statements 18 and 19, they agree that a command of English following regular language practice with locals,

notwithstanding the quality of local English, would help them know the local culture or way of thinking. Studies by Kim (1976) and Selltiz *et al.*, (1963) support this theory, where the latter study show the majority of the Indochinese refugees in the US expressed a strong need for communication training and general cultural orientation. For the students in this study, the processes of adjustment include making attempts to initiate communication with the locals, and creating opportunities to have more encounters. Consistent with Kim's (1988) theory of strangers' communicating in a new environment, this positive theory of interaction adjustment is the result of their acquiring the coping mechanisms that help in dealing with the new environment, of coming to terms with it and feeling more at ease, satisfied and less stressed. It is also useful to look at this adjustive interaction process within Ruben's (1975) parameter of human communication, where the interpersonal communication of strangers is referred to as their social engagement through people in their 'immediate micro-level environment' (Kim, 1988:66). Such engagements with hosts (like landlords or a multicultural circle of friends and acquaintances, as in statement 19) not only provide recreational activities for them but also help them improve their English as well as cultural knowledge. Bochner, Buker and McLeod (1976), Bochner, McLeod and Lin (1977) and Bochner and Orr (1979) also show sojourning overseas students tend to rely on social networks for cultural learning.

However, not all the students their adjustment is facilitated through interaction with locals. They attribute their lack of language improvement to lack of 'good language opportunities' (statement 21), but are not encouraged to participate more in interaction with host nationals, nor 'actively engage in the host society' (Kim, 1988:62). These study abroad experiences also impact the informants' education here (e.g. statement 18: '(I am) worried about not learning English...') with them reporting stagnant language knowledge. Responses to open-ended questions about the learning aspects of the experience revealed they obtained some selected knowledge about language and culture (e.g. statement 16: 'They (the locals) are important to give you information about local culture) through their interactions, and not enough outside the classroom (e.g. statement 23: 'Interaction only in the classroom. Not outside...'). These students' dissatisfaction is strongly associated with their interaction adjustment and raises the theory that the lack of



meaningful and beneficial interaction with locals has been found to hinder adjustment to life overseas.

This study on interaction adjustment suggests that there are strong motivations for intercultural interactions, with the students eager to improve their English, and that interaction quality and quantity beyond the classroom are determinants of interaction adjustment, and not just serendipitous learning. This means that the informants would like meaningful contact, or more of it, with host nationals and that they would benefit socially, academically and psychologically from the encounters, although it can be seen that the extent of host-sojourner interactions is limited and this has created a general feeling of dissatisfaction.

#### 4.6.2.5 Two contrasting theories

Two contrasting theories here are represented. One group of students facilitates its own interaction adjustment with persistence and flexibility, building social networks by making friends with locals. Their motivation is not only from recreational desire but also functional needs to improve their academic performance through language learning. Ward and Kennedy (1993) have explained such motivation through their theory of locus of control, which are 'inner-directed drives and motivation' (Ting-Toomey, 1999: 241). They believe that an adjustive personality helps in developing host communication competence and that by continually seeking new ways to handle life in Singapore, they can expand their cultural sensitivities and repertoire of language skills (e.g. speaking skill). Their theories tie in well with those that view the degree of social interaction between the host national and the sojourner is related to the latter's adjustment, and that it is significantly related to satisfaction with the sojourn. For example, based on the findings of a study in Australia, Au (1969) reported that the degree of personal contact between Chinese-Malaysian students and host nationals positively related to the students' attitudes towards Australia.

The other group finds it difficult to deal with the 'shocks' of intercultural interaction, where they find the pronunciation of English-speaking Singaporeans and the lack of

language opportunities outside the classroom frustrating and dissatisfying, thus contributing to their lack of adjustment. Their reports of not being able to endure the new challenges seem to indicate acts of self-imposed barriers against interaction adjustment, but what they believe is that the environment does not help to make their interaction easy.

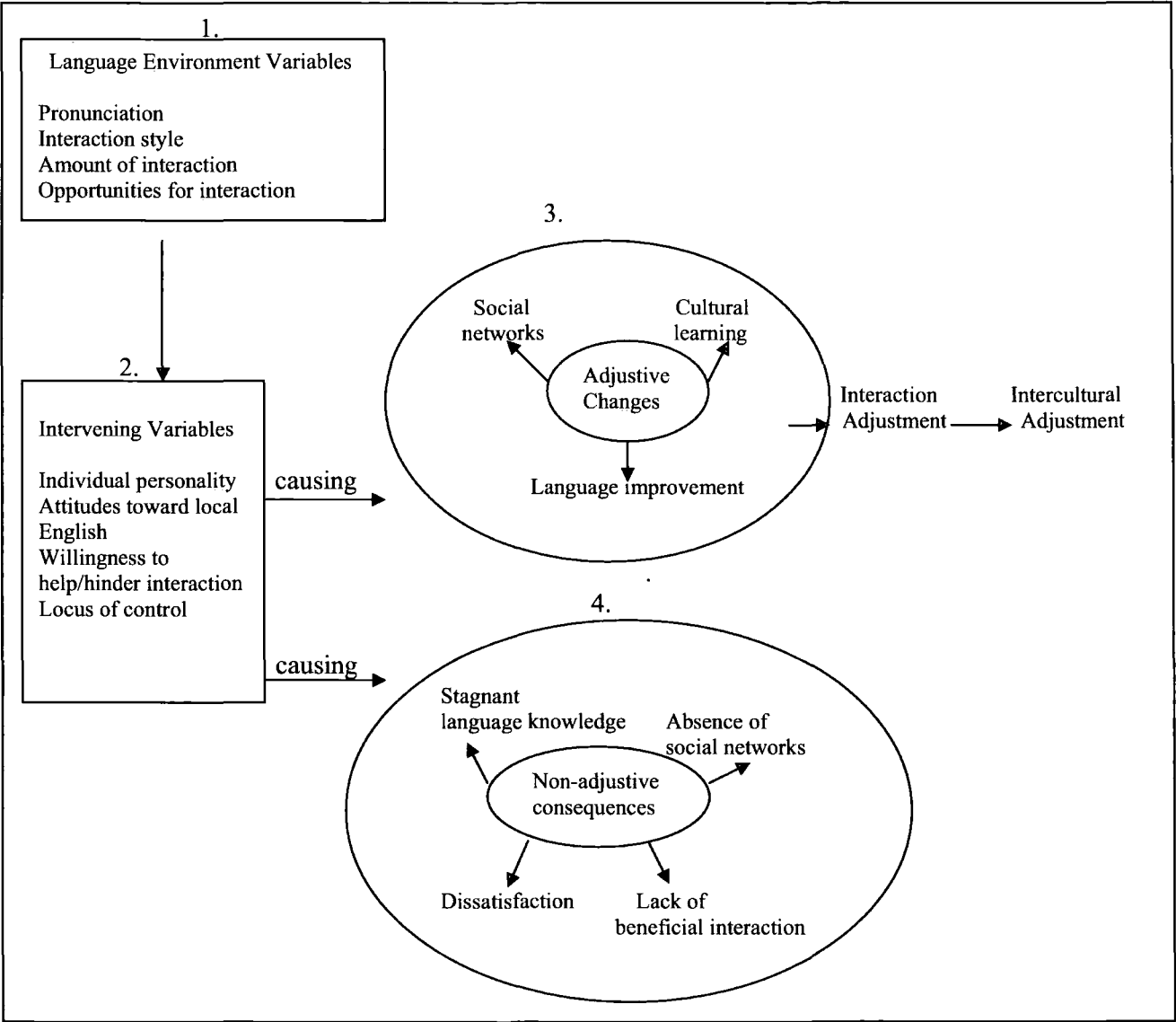


Fig. 4.3 Variables affecting Interaction Adjustment

Dimension 1 serves as the engine that propels them on the adjustive journey as they encounter the factors, such as pronunciation and interaction style etc., that most affect them. Personality, willingness etc. help or hinder interaction and act as intervening elements in dimension 2 in the process towards adjustive changes, perceived by the students to cause those changes to take place; this dimension leads to interaction adjustment and also intercultural adjustment. In dimension 3, adjustive changes give rise to forming social networks, language improvement etc. Dimension 4 consists of the non-adjustive results of the students coping in their new environment and how and to what extent factors such as personality, for example, intervene in the process.

#### 4.6.3 Adjustment to the new culture

Adjusting to a new culture is also part of language learning because language learners often find themselves in situations where they have to understand a range of competences that are not only communicative but also intercultural. They have to understand,

...the relationships between cultures, the demands of experiencing another way of life – rather than merely learning about it – and where they have to be mediators between different ways of living and interpreting the world, between cultures. (Byram, 1995: 54 )

In this sense, adjustment to a new culture is juxtaposed to interaction adjustment, and one never knows which one precedes the other, if one has to; ‘experiencing another way of life’ thus operates side-by-side with language learning, and the language learners in this study are adjusting not only to new language learning approaches in a different country, but also to the intercultural learning and adjustive processes involved that are often perplexing and confusing, and more so in the context of this study, as expressed by student 9, ‘ It (Singaporean culture) is different to what I imagined’ .

Such confusion can be cleared if one explains that China and Singapore share many similarities (food, Mandarin language, etc.) where such cultural and racial similarities

equip the students with the potential to adjust successfully to their host environment. This is, as shown below, not the case in this study. However, both intercultural and language learning are processes that, if achieved with a measure of success, will lead to intercultural adjustment, that is, if one says that successful adjustment presupposes the understanding of relationships, meeting the demands of intercultural learning and adopting mediating strategies.

Moreover, the connection between adjustment to the new culture and intercultural adjustment is more apparent and direct in this section. The theory of intercultural adjustment here is grounded in perceptions of how similar and dissimilar the informants' culture is to local culture, and by extension, PRC people to Singaporeans.

Cultural similarity is both a group-level and an individual-level concept in this study. Interviews and written data have shown the essential features of perceived similarity to be race (i.e. skin colour, and only to the Chinese Singaporeans), 'They (Singaporean Chinese) look Chinese but are not like us.', language (only in the Mandarin language: 'Same language but different pronunciation') and ideology (only to some aspects of it): 'We (PRC Chinese) are similar in thinking: family, laws, travel...but only a few have this similarity.' The data did not reveal other perceived similarities.

In general, cultural dissimilarity can be classified as the extent to which the two groups differ externally from each other on a variety of dimensions, such as race, language, and other socio-cultural patterns. Adjustment theorists such as Babiker et al (1980) and Furnham and Bochner (1982) devised cultural-distance indices in the hope they will provide insight into their students' own perceptions of differences or feelings about them, and include variables such as climate, food, clothes, religion and family structure.

Adjustment is hampered by feelings of prejudice and dissimilarity between the two cultures. Smalley's research (1963) proposed that, in one of the four stages of cultural shock, strangers have feelings of hostility and frustration with aspects of the new culture. These students perceive prejudice and negative perceptions as coming from host members and develop heightened feelings of cultural dissimilarities. Both prejudice and

perceived dissimilarity are strongly evident in the data and contribute to the theory that such feelings hinder adjustment.

#### 4.6.3.1 Prejudice

The students perceive prejudice as coming from the Singaporean Chinese. It is interesting that, although it is not uncommon for international students in general to experience prejudice and discrimination, especially in cases where there are cultural differences between sojourners and host nationals, these Chinese students would experience such feelings from their racial counterparts in Singapore. The following statements are explicit on this,

1. ‘ Singapore Chinese don’t like PRC Chinese. Many look down on Chinese. Some are unfriendly...it seems they think Singapore is richer than China.’ (S. 6/M)

When he was asked about such experiences, he described some unpleasant encounters with shop assistants and other vendors,,

2. ‘ They look at me, maybe they think I have no money to pay. Many times, in the stores and many places. I am not used to (it).’ (S.6/M)

15<sup>th</sup> September 2001: W. (S.6/M)’s emotional statement reflects his distress that people are hostile through their looks. He explains it’s because of the way Singaporeans think of PR China people. His perception is that the attitude present in locals to him is due to long-standing historical belief that they come from less developed country

Reflections: W. feels that Singaporeans have negative feelings towards him and is always mindful of the way they look at him. Even though he is Chinese and shares many cultural similarities with local Chinese there seems to be differences in values, certain customs, attitudes and enough to make him feel negatively

stereotyped. This creates negative expectations for interaction with hosts, and is altogether a negative experience for this student!

(Location: classroom; Time: 4.30pm, Duration: 60 minues, informants: 16)

Chapter 2 has discussed various definitions and views on prejudice. Allport (1954) uses the term 'unfair attitude', not to define it but to point to its importance as a social phenomenon.

It is possible that such perceptions are enhanced by the frequent stress when students are thrust into the roles of ambassadors or representatives of their country, often by well-meaning people but sometimes by those who denigrate the achievements of the students' country of origin. In shops, for example, there may be a tendency to speak slowly and clearly on the assumption that a foreigner's English is poor. This could be amusing, annoying or infuriating, depending on the circumstances, and is a burden that all foreigners must occasionally bear. There is also the possibility that some conditions can lead to misunderstanding and hostility between foreign students and host members. However, the situation in Singapore is unique because most shops employ the local Chinese and both groups (if the vendors were Chinese) could use the mutually intelligible dialect Mandarin to remove communication barriers. The statements above interestingly reveal that the perceived prejudice is not racial but rather in socio-economic status. The words 'being from China' and being 'PRC Chinese' in statements 1 and 2 also indicate that the students find this discrimination is related to their country of origin. The experiences described in both statements also evoked a sense of inferiority in the informants, which phenomenon is described elsewhere as related to 'ethnic prestige', which refers to the 'overall standing attributed to that group relative to other groups in society' (Kim, 2001: 155). The informants feel that their prestige is closely associated with the socio-economic status of their country (which they explained is considered as lower), and decreases local people's regard and acceptance of them.

Closely related to this but more visibly cultural is another aspect of prejudice,

3. 'Some people don't like my culture because I'm from China. You don't like me so I don't like you.' (S. 9/M)

This statement is remarkable because both groups are seen by them to share racial and cultural similarities. However, they have become aware of a social situation where they find it difficult to define their place in the social system. Their theory of prejudice is consistent with Tajfel's argument that the reason for intergroup differentiation is in the need that the individuals have to 'provide social meaning to social identity to the intergroup situation...and that this need is fulfilled through the creation of intergroup differences when such differences do not in fact exist...' (1981:276) That is not to say that the differences are not perceived to exist between the host group and the informants; the argument is that their belief is a strategy of intergroup differentiation. More markers of differentiation are related to clothing, and more,

4. ' Many people think we're strange. Maybe my dress or something. In the bus, MRT (underground public transport), they look at me up and down. In China, they don't do that.'

This student feels that his clothing makes him stand out as 'strange' against the backdrop of mainstream Singaporeans and is particularly difficult for him to ease into the host social and environmental milieu. His ethnocentric remark indicates he does not believe that he's strange but that people here are acting out a prejudice against him which, according to Allport (1954), is a demonstration of ' moral evaluation' (p. 11). Previous research shows that nonverbal behaviours have associated evaluations ranging from extremely positive to extremely negative, and according to Burgoon (1992), this student views the stares as very negative and associated with prejudice.

It also has to be mentioned that certain physical or material identifiers are stereotyped by Singaporeans towards and commonly associated with the PRC Chinese, although these may not be obvious to non-Singaporeans. Such markers include clothing, speech patterns,

unique gestures and other body movements that help to distinguish them from the local Chinese. This student feels that such markers do not work in his favour but only set him apart as 'strange'. By comparing the situation to that of his country, he is exacerbating the difference he already feels and the uneasiness of being distinguished as a PRC Chinese. Another student refers to being stared at and equates it with prejudice,

5. 'People stare at us as strangers. It's because we are from PRC. If somebody stares at you, it gives you a bad feeling. It means they don't like you.' (S. 7/M)

Levels of gazing vary across cultures. Research by Burgoon, Coker and Coker (1986) shows that the high-gaze person may be seen as disrespectful, threatening or insulting but it does not mention a link to prejudice against nationality. This student feels it can only be prejudice against his nationality in the offensive staring, a non-verbal sign that signals to him a communication attitude which is discriminatory. More students have experienced such staring and share the same conclusion,

6. 'Singaporeans are prejudiced against other nationalities.' S. 11/B)
7. 'Some are prejudiced against nationality,'
8. 'Singaporeans don't like Chinese from PRC, against nationality' (S. 17/G)

Moreover, such perceived negative impressions can be examined against the more general concept of host receptivity. Generally, host receptivity is expressed largely in a continuum from the openness towards strangers and willingness to accommodate them with opportunities to participate in the local social communication processes, to closedness, indifference, hostility and rejection (Kim, 2001). In this study, data lean towards negative perceptions of host receptivity and indicate how the students feel they are assessed by local Singaporeans. Such rebuffs experienced at the hands of host culture members cause them to make the following remarks,

9. 'Singaporeans are haughty.'(S. 18/F)
10. 'Singaporeans are snobbish.'(S.2/F)



Once again, these statements are linked, although indirectly, to perceived prejudicial judgement made by Singaporeans, similar to statement 1 which refers to 'look down on'; such action also conveys condescension to the students.

In the everyday lives of these students, host receptivity to them (or lack thereof) is manifested in a variety of explicit and implicit communication messages and behaviours in the host environment and its members. More appropriate to this study, where hindering factors to adjustment are examined, are those implicit behaviours that take the form of subtle and not-so-subtle messages embedded in the communication styles of host members and how they negatively affect the informants. Describing Singaporeans as snobbish and haughty is a manifestation of such effects and contributes further to psychological adjustment barriers. It is possible that such attitudes may alter if they perceive better or more host receptivity, as one of them remarked,

11. 'I have been invited sometimes (by local people). But you have to try...to make friends here.' (S. 15/F)

Though participation and explicit communication may be very effective for cultural learning and intercultural adjustment, they also depend on the willingness of the locals to allow them to participate or communicate. If Singaporeans, in their eyes, do not extend such willingness to them and are snobbish and distant, they will not make more effort to participate, as some demonstrate

12. '(I am ) always socializing with Chinese, I mean PRC Chinese.' (S.13/F)  
13. 'I only speak to my landlord.' (S. 7/M)  
14. 'I only talk to Singaporeans when I need something.' (S. 13/F)

Over two thirds of the group complained of prejudice both directly and indirectly. The direct statements also refer to words similar to prejudice such as 'look down on' and

‘don’t like us’ that they theorise as nationality based. Indirectly, the looks, stares and other implicit messages are also interpreted as prejudice.

In this section, one of the defining characteristics of their view of prejudice is that they perceive the conduct from host nationals as a series of prejudicial behaviours. Herman and Schield (1960) explain that such perceptions can stem from the lack of security strangers face in their new surroundings, as they do not have the knowledge necessary to fully understand their new environment or the communication of the people who live in it. However, with three quarters of Singapore’s population being ethnic Chinese, it is regarded as having a predominantly Chinese culture and therefore familiar to the PR China students. On the similarities between both cultures, Tsang (2001) is explicit, ‘Though further empirical research is required for assessing how far and in what aspects the cultures of China and Singapore are similar, it is reasonable to say that the two cultures are closer together than are separated with cultures of most other countries’ (p. 6). While this statement is true to a large extent, there are many intervening factors, as seen in this section, that act to impede the process of adjustment, and this is supported further by Tsang, ‘Despite the cultural similarity, Singapore and China are very different in some other aspects, such as political and economic systems. It is likely that mainland Chinese need to undergo an adjustment process when settling down in Singapore.’ (p. 6-7)

Their experiences are laced with uncertainty and anxiety during intergroup interactions, consisting of reports of host group behaviour, ranging from disapproving looks, staring and haughty stance. For them, such conduct is the result of prejudice on the part of host members, and directed toward nationality, hitting at their ethnic prestige. Stephan and Stephan (1985) argue that people fear four types of consequences when interacting with strangers: the negative consequences for our self-concepts (we worry about feeling incompetent, confused, not in control), negative behavioral consequences (fear strangers will exploit us or dominate us), negative evaluations (we fear rejection, ridicule, disapproval and being stereotyped negatively) and negative evaluations by members of our in-groups (if we interact with strangers, members of our in-group might reject us or

disapprove of us) . As a result of being often stared at, the students interpret that locals are prejudiced against them and stereotype them negatively, as being PR China nationals with a lower socio-economic status. The stress of having to depend on interpreting meanings from non-verbal behaviour is apt to lead to anxiety, discouragement and also can affect his/her mental outlook. They are constantly working and living in cultural settings that present new and perplexing situations and must accept the fact that they have to go through awkward learning stages, and cope with the uncomfortable feelings of insecurity and devaluation inherent in the process.

Such responses to new and unfamiliar behaviour in the new environment are consistent with those in research by Gudykunst (2003), who puts forward the nonverbal expectancy violations theory to explain how strangers to a new culture evaluate nonverbal behaviours. According to the theory, strangers are aroused and distracted positively or negatively when their expectations of behaviours is violated. During the process, strangers compare the nonverbal behaviour individuals use with their own expectations. When actual behaviours are viewed more negatively than expected behaviours negative violations occur. The students in the study view staring as a nonverbal behaviour that violates their expectancy, thus interprets it as negative as it is infused with prejudice against them.

#### 4.6.3.2 Perceived Cultural Dissimilarities

The issue of ethnic proximity and how it promotes intercultural adjustment is raised in this section but, as seen later, is not necessarily a determinant of successful intercultural adjustment. Kim (2001) refers to it as the 'degree of similarity (or difference) of the stranger's ethnicity-based characteristics relative to the corresponding characteristics predominant in the host environment.' (p. 170).

A large learner-group of Chinese from the People's Republic of China regularly selects Singapore as an academic destination because of the numerous intensive English training programs offered by local institutions. The students in this study hoped to improve their

English through such formal structured programs and also to rely on host-sojourner interaction for auxiliary language skills and cultural knowledge,

1. 'There are many Chinese here (Singapore).' and 'Singapore is near China and education is similar'.

However, not all in the respondent group express a cultural fit between China and Singapore; most perceive a gap,

2. 'Singaporeans accept western culture but we follow eastern culture. Language and dressing are different. Everything is different to China.' (S.13/F)

The first dimension of the cultural distance is concerned with the differences between western and eastern cultures, especially in language and dressing, and the second with the continuing adherence to eastern habits within the new cultural milieu. This affirms her capacity to accept and adjust while maintaining her cultural identity. The two dimensions co-exist and promote adjustment as two identities, one that accepts the differences and the other that preserves the self (Berry, 1984, 1994, Ward & Kennedy, 1994); such studies have shown that such a model of acculturation can exist as two dimensions independent of each other.

However, such cultural distance can be challenging to others in the group,

3. 'Although I'm same in race but I'm different in culture and beliefs. I feel like a foreigner' (S. 16/F)

Interview notes: 'foreigner' to her means being non-Chinese. Beliefs refer to religious ones, and even superstitions, as examples given by the student.

'15<sup>th</sup> September 2001: The informants discuss the meaning of 'foreigner'; one of them says foreigner means being non-Chinese. So they believe that, even though they are Chinese, they feel foreign because they have different beliefs, that refer to religious ones, and even superstitions, believing in ghosts, etc. and always hearing

stories of the supernatural from her landlord. This seems amusing to many of the group informants and they exchange stories about what they heard. They say the topics they have with locals (their landlords and family members, people they meet in their neighbourhoods) are more about the supernatural than other topics, such as politics and different ideologies between the two countries

Reflections: Their evaluation of most Singaporeans is that they are superstitious, which is different to them. In fact, this is only one example of the many differences they feel between themselves and their Singaporean hosts, e.g. religion, political ideologies, etc. While some in the group feel they don't have to make any effort to understand and know more about the differences, a small group (four informants) feel they are disadvantaged by their lack of knowledge.'

(Location: Classroom; Time: 4.30pm; Duration: 60 minutes, Informants: 16)

PRC sojourners find their circumstances and differences confusing because Singaporeans are both Chinese yet different. Since the Chinese represent a majority in both settings, the students initially may be overestimating the extent of their ability for acculturative adjustment. They realise that racial and certain cultural similarities also do not incorporate aspects such as religion (church-going practices), or even ideology,

4. 'The Singaporeans go to church...and believe in ghosts' (S.9/M)
5. 'We seldom talk about politics (laughter). We don't discuss politics because we have different viewpoints. So we try to avoid politics' (S.15/F)

During interviewing, mild laughter sometimes came in the midst of certain 'sensitive issues'. No further inquiry was made because there may have been underlying feelings of embarrassment from having to elaborate on such topics. Furthermore, having a sense of humour, according to Gudykunst (2003) is a trait that helps in successfully managing changes, and is important for keeping one from becoming too frustrated and angry. Politics and religion were briefly mentioned and did not shed more light, although enough to show they see a fundamental difference, and one that possibly hampers further

adjustment, if any. Without relevant cultural knowledge, it is difficult to understand the new culture,

6. 'If we don't know much about culture here, maybe we get into trouble. I have not much knowledge about the culture and history of Singapore. It is different culture here and hard to understand. So mixed. (S. 2/F)

The student feels that the lack of cultural knowledge impedes her adjustment, indicated by her anxiety of 'getting into trouble'. Like statement 3, this statement indicates that culture is a factor closely associated with adjustment.

In this section, ethnic similarity is shown as not necessarily a determinant of successful intercultural adjustment. The students find that there are many cultural facets that differentiate them from host nationals, such as religion, ideology, beliefs, politics, history, pronunciation and clothing. They find their circumstances confusing because Singaporeans are both Chinese yet different, that is, ethnically racially similar to them yet foreign in ways that interfere in their adjustive process, making it hard for them to understand local culture and adjust to it. However, this did not induce identity conflict as they are able to accept the differences yet adhere to their own values and beliefs. Both entities can co-exist and even lead to successful adjustment, and according to Berry (1984), they are 'independent rather than intrinsically conflicting' (in Leong and Ward, 2000:766).

The data establish a link between perceived cultural dissimilarities and intercultural adjustment. Research has shown that strangers from a culture similar to the host would begin their adjustment process with a greater advantage and that a source of adjustive predisposition is the degree of similarity in many aspects ranging from political to religious (Kim, 1988). Such an advantage is found among those whose racial and cultural features resemble those of the host members. However, the study here shows that this is not necessarily the case. In fact, racial and some cultural similarities have shown that the informants are more prone to confusion than adjustment, and attribute the problem to their ignorance of many elements in the host culture that facilitate adjustment (such as

history or local beliefs). Therefore this theory of adjustment is not reliant on cultural and racial proximity.

#### 4.7 Summarising theories on adjustment to a new culture, revealed in written work

*When the plane wings cross Singapore, I saw the neon sign in the centre of the city.  
I felt very excited and it seemed very close to me. I don't know how to say, but I  
really had the heart shaken.*

Social researchers have tended to use diaries and letters as sources when they have been elicited from their authors. However, in this study, the written documents are provided by the informants voluntarily, initiated by two group members in order to express thoughts and perspectives that reflect and summarise their sojourn from the time of their arrival to the time when the documents were collected. Some have found that writing the accounts was useful for expressing culminated feelings and thoughts of their sojourn and others view it as a writing exercise, with well-intentioned attempts to present colourful written discourse.

The examination of data involves the same process of analysis and grounding of theory in the data, and in order to enhance confidence in the findings they are also cross-referenced with similar aspects in the interview data. The task here is then to show that one set of data complements the other but why it also varies, which could be due to the different exigencies of the methods, incurring different moods and attitudes in the informants; an informant may feel differently writing about a certain aspect than verbalizing it. Moreover, as the interviews were conducted before the writing, the informants were already familiar with the terminology, issues and focus of the study in which they were involved. They were thus able to think more deeply about issues during writing and without the constraint of time and pressure of having to give immediate verbal answers. However, there could also be disadvantages in using the written work to support the interview data.

With the informants aware their written work is to be examined and that written records can be potentially incriminating, the veracity and sincerity of the statements may be questionable (this will be further discussed in the section). However, Pearson-Evans, (2006) in her use of diaries as data sources, found such data useful as she discovers they have the 'candour and personal nature of students' writing' (p. 58). While a single short summary account (submitted by each informant in this study) cannot be compared to a diary account, the written texts show some inconsistency with interview data in terms of adjustment. The limitation of using the written texts is noted but they are used, nevertheless, as some issues are found only in the texts and not in the other data.

The meanings of words were sometimes ambiguous but checking the meanings was straightforward as the researcher had easy access to the informants. It was not as easy during interviewing as stopping the informants too often would have disrupted the flow, and the moment would have passed to recall a meaning accurately. The informants were given 2 weeks for writing and mostly used electronic or hard-copy dictionaries to translate words from Chinese into English. Very often, the English words would not fit the context of the sentence, and with easy access to the informants, further checking with them was straightforward. For example, a student wrote, '...I have recognized many friends whom are Singaporean'. The word 'recognized' was used by the student selecting arbitrarily among the many Chinese-English dictionary words for *rèn shí*, which also means meet or know. Getting the right meaning for their words often made the analysis less straightforward and a longer process, involving asking several times for the original words in Chinese to ensure that the meaning was contextually right. Foreign language learners of English, and in this case PR China students, often tend to select inappropriate English words in their writing. In their research on PR China students in the National University of Singapore, Goh and Tan (2003) noticed the same problem, '...these students (PR China students) when using translation to facilitate communication make mistakes in word choice and expressions.' (p. 62) Moreover, the language tends to be more flowery as students have time to think more deeply about their experiences and explore more ways in expressing themselves, often making literal translations from



Chinese into English, ‘ I don’t know how to say, but I really had the heart shaken’, literal translation that means he was moved by his first sight of Singapore.

Generally, people who write documents are likely to have personal points of view they want to get across (Bryman, 2001), and as a result, arranging the numerous viewpoints into representative themes by way of the grounded theory process became a challenging task. The researcher thus found that the texts fell into 3 major themes:

Pre-Departure Knowledge

General Adjustment

Interaction Adjustment

The category Pre-Departure Knowledge arises from the written document but is absent in the interview data, simply because the informants did not speak about it. However, the written data is treated separately in this chapter as they appear more as the students’ ruminations as they recall their feelings prior to departure, together with certain aspects of general and interaction adjustment, and even some of their aspirations, unlike the interview data that mainly consist of answers that are provided to meet specific interview schedules. It is also the researcher’s view that the written accounts are a culmination of the adjustment process as well as an outcome of a feedback process on how they had progressed, and that are unrestrained to a large extent by strict guidelines on what to write, apart from advice that the topic be kept close to their intercultural experiences to and in Singapore.

#### 4.7.1 Pre-departure knowledge

According to research on sojourners, international students have been frequently the focus of longitudinal research. Those studies concentrated on predicting cross-cultural adjustment by pre-departure variables and monitoring changes in the levels of psychological and sociocultural adjustment over time (Ward, Furnham and Bochner,

2001). Although this study is not longitudinal in nature, their written work chronicled their sojourn in Singapore that covered 6 months.

Many write about their knowledge of Singapore prior to their trip, and how it influenced their decision to study here.

1. 'I hadn't been to Singapore before I came here. I only heard some information about Singapore from some people who had traveled here. They said Singapore is a very beautiful and developed state. After I graduated from senior middle school my father decided to send me here because the education here is similar to the western way.' (S.6/M)
2. 'When I decided to go to another country for studying. I had prepared for an uncomfortable life for at least several years. In fact I don't like hot weather. But at last I chose Singapore because it is clean safe and not very far from China so my parents won't be worried.' (S.3/F)

Although both students had differing pre-departure impressions about Singapore, they were positive about their imminent trip to the new country and an academic sojourn that could last a few years. Pre-departure knowledge is not a background construct that emerged in the interview data, due to the scarcity of data on it, but it is also possible that the researcher's questions did not give them opportunities to raise the topic. Nearly half of the informants in this group included some pre-departure knowledge of Singapore and how they heard about it through friends and others who had already been to the country. According to Tsang (2001), such knowledge is important for the sojourner as it 'reduces the uncertainty facing the individual by increasing the predictability of the new situation and by increasing the individual's anticipatory familiarity.' (p. 352). In keeping with this point of view, the informants showed how their decisions in choosing Singapore as their academic destination were influenced by its level of education, cleanliness, safety and geographical proximity, and that these factors reduced not only their own worries but those of their parents. However, Tsang warns that his respondents' answers concerning pre-departure knowledge were based

on memory, 'which may fade with time' (p. 358). Although this is possible, these informants' statements are clear and unambiguous.

Most of the students seem to have made decisions that were based on careful consideration and planning. The following statement reveals the cautious reasoning of the student done before departure,

3. 'I had thought about my decision over before I left my home. I felt confident of studying and living in Singapore. There were so many things to think of before I decided. But I couldn't accept myself to think of everything. It was impossible. I only told myself not to hesitate. The choice was right or wrong. Nobody knew. I preferred failing the decision to regretting about a missed opportunity. Then I took off (on) the plane by myself. It just like a dream to me.' (S. 10/M)

Ying and Liese's (1990) study examined the pre-departure variables on post-arrival adjustment of 172 Taiwanese students in the US, and one of the predictive variables included pre-departure adjustment or depression. Their study revealed that the pre-departure level of depression, among other variables such as personality, expectations and self-assessed language ability, was the strongest predictor of post-arrival adjustment. However, there is no such indication in statement 3 and, in fact, the student had been feeling confident and encouraged about going to Singapore, although he admitted that he couldn't think of everything, which also implies there is some worrying. It was not so much a leap into the unknown for him but a chance for an overseas education and experience that he had to take, not wanting to regret a 'missed opportunity'. In this sense, his pre-departure knowledge consists of not only general facts about Singapore but also a mature understanding of what an overseas trip might entail. Nowhere else in the written data of the other students is there evidence of depression or excessive worrying.

Much of what was written by the informants on their pre-departure knowledge is about the educational standards of Singapore. The following statement summarises and also sums up their collective viewpoints about how their beliefs influenced their decisions,

4. 'Before I came to Singapore, I heard much information (from) friends or internet. Singapore is a developed city country with high-development. He has beautiful sight and good public order, which are due to his government investment and attach importance to education. He has a high fervency in education and an excellent educational quality. A lot of people are used to living here. He has not only a traditional culture of China, but also a good English environment. So I decided to study in Singapore.' ( S. 17/F)

The informant gained an image of Singapore through media information and friends' testimonies before she left, like most of her group members, and believed that cultural and traditional similarities would facilitate her adjustment to the new environment. Empirical research on cultural similarity and work on culture distance show that the effects of cultural similarity facilitated sojourners abroad (Torbiorn, 1982). Any apparent feelings of anxiety or uncertainty are also allayed by perceptions of cultural similarity, and Gudykunst (2003) explains that 'the degree to which our group is similar to strangers' groups also influences our ability to reduce uncertainty' (p.33).

Also, the informant was asked to clarify the meaning of 'fervency' and explained it was *rè zhōng*, that is, to be passionate or intense about something related to one's country, ideals, sport, etc. Like most of the students in her cohort, she believed that such fervent efforts by Singapore's government to maintain high academic standards would surely mean that its schools and English language teaching methods, have strong educational value. Such beliefs show that they had carefully considered Singapore as a destination because it is able to offer, in their minds, educational opportunities for language improvement in and out of its educational institutions. In the interview data, 2 informants talk about the advantage of coming to Singapore to learn English and how it

compares to China's, ' We heard it has good environment to learn English' and ' Coming to learn *correct* English as it can be different to China's English.'

By acquiring culture-specific knowledge prior to departing, they are gaining helpful insights into Singapore's history, economic, social and political institutions, language, relevant norms, rules and customs. Gudykunst (2003) explains that such knowledge helps create awareness of what strangers need to know when they enter a new environment. Such knowledge can also facilitate psychological adjustment to their new sociocultural environment (Ward, Furnham and Bochner, 2001). Moreover, Kim (1988) affirms that 'strangers' adaptive potential is further promoted by their preparedness for change, or psychological 'readiness' and informational familiarity with the host culture prior to, or during, the initial period of adaptation in the new environment.' (p. 135). Ryan and Twibell (2000) confirm that information on the new culture helps in adjustment, and that 'if a student can know what to expect, the likelihood of satisfactory adjustment is greater.' (p. 431).

The informants are not explicit about whether their pre-departure knowledge helped them adjust in the new environment. Their accounts are mainly made up of information related to the country's reputation of being modern and well-developed, and its educational system and language environment. According to current thinking (op.cit. Gudykunst; Kim), pre-departure knowledge helps promote strangers' adaptive potential, and the students' accounts here show that they had looked forward to their study in Singapore and that some background knowledge of the culture had influenced their decision in choosing this country.

#### 4.7.2 General Adjustment: weather, education, general aspects

In research by Black and Stephens (1989), Parker and McEvoy ( 1993) and Tsang (2001), some facets of sojourner adjustment are identified. General adjustment, as explained in section 4.6, involves the managing of daily activities and the conditions in which they are carried out.

An important aspect of general adjustment is how the informants feel about the weather and the way they cope with it,

1. 'But Singapore is really small and hot. I know the weather isn't the hottest now...I didn't very adapt (to it)' (S 6/M)
2. 'I felt so hot when I first arrived in Singapore' (S. 14/M)
3. 'I felt a little hopeless (here). The temperature in here is very high and the air is so wet.' (S. 16/F)

Statement 1 is similar to statement 14 in section 4.5.2. in which both informants express their dislike of local weather. The same statement also echoes statement 15 in the same section, 4.5.2, where the informants use remarkably similar words to describe how small and hot Singapore is. When asked what she meant by *hopeless*, Student 16 explained that *bù kě shòu shí* meant she could not *accept* or *manage* Singapore's hot humid weather. Such reactions are common for sojourners who find it hard to avoid some physiological reactions due to '(a) relocation and (b) the stressors occurring on the intellectual, behavioural and emotional levels.' (Befus, 1988: 386). Both sets of data make consistent references to the weather, at the centre of which is their intolerance of the heat and humidity and also their acknowledgement that it is one of the causes of their stress. These persistent references to the weather in both written and interview data therefore highlight the importance of the effect of weather on the adjustment of the students.

Moreover, the researcher had observed on a daily basis the students' physical discomfort and reactions to the weather, as they arrived in class often complaining about the heat and humidity, and how they would never be used to them. The environmental changes for them appear to be salient factors that challenge them both physically and psychologically, with many reporting in the interview data too, of headaches, illness and worry of not adapting to it. Masuda, Lin and Tazuma (1982) were able to observe a link between life changes and psychological and psychosomatic distress when they conducted a study on Vietnamese refugees in the U.S., using the Cornell Medical Index to measure

psychosomatic symptoms. More culture shock research also show there is a relationship between life events and physical and psychological distress, to the extent that, when the sojourner's body has to adjust to new foods, temperatures and other environmental factors, it may also experience symptoms associated with psychological distress in culture shock (Befus, 1988). When this happens, the sojourner 'cannot think as clearly, adapt behaviour or manage emotions as well as before', and such thinking and emotions could 'contribute toward increased stress symptoms and poor adjustment.' (ibid, p. 387). However, this link has been critiqued as being exaggerated, and that while it is apparent that there is a moderate positive relationship, life changes account for only a small proportion of the variance in the well-being of sojourners (Ward, Furnham and Bochner, 2001).

It is obvious, however, the effects of weather have strong impact on the adjustment process of the students, as evidenced in both written and verbal data in this study. This part of their theory of adjustment to Singapore establishes an unequivocal link between such effects and their adjustment process, as the students complain of headaches and fatigue (in interview data), and hopelessness and getting sick (in the written data). Brislin (1981) calls climate a situational variable, explaining that some individuals spend a great deal of time coping with uncomfortable climate situations. A student elaborates more on the weather difference and how it affects her health,

4. ' I didn't get used to the weather when I came here. Because the north of China is very cold, Singapore's weather is warmer than any country. Although nearly every place has air-condition, I always get sick.' (S. 9/M)

The work of DiMarco (1974) and Barna (1983) highlights the physiological and emotional stress inherent in the sojourner's experience of culture shock, while Befus (op.cit.) views it as an adjustment reaction caused by interactive, multiple levels of stress. Such theories explain that culture shock is not only a syndrome that affects sojourners intellectually, emotionally and behaviorally, but physiologically as well, especially in relation to the weather. While statement 4 above mentions weather as the cause of illness,

likewise interview statement 16 in section 4.5.2. shows the informant believes that the weather is responsible for his headaches and his inability to concentrate in school,. Similarly, Tsang (2001) found that general adjustment had some influence on the performance of his student sample, and while weather is not specifically mentioned as one of the causes, factors ranging from living conditions to facilities are mentioned.

Another outcome is that the feeling of *uprooting* can further impede adjustment. In attempting to understand the process of *uprooting* and its effects on the mental health of students, Zwingmann and Gunn (1983) point out that climatic dissimilarity is a condition that contributes to the uprooting disorder. This uprooting process is seen as a partial distancing of individuals from their familiar milieu and the 'disruption of the habitual patterns of gratification' (in Furnham and Bochner, 1986: 126) Also, Babiker et al (1980) include climate as a variable linked to psychological stress but have not elaborated on it specifically. Therefore, although it is an aspect of adjustment in this study, there is very little theoretical and empirical data elsewhere to give it further significance. Lam's (2006) study of mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong looks into their adjustment problems related to cultural, social and self perception, instead of 'looking into the commonly addressed difficulties in adjusting to the different diet, geographic environment and different spoken language, which did not appear to be major difficulties for most Mainland students...' (p. 106). While this is the case for mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong, an area which has a cold season, the concern with weather is significant to other such students sojourners staying in sub-tropic climates, such as that of Singapore. It can be said then that PR China students in Singapore have more problems of adjustment because weather is another factor that impedes adjustment here. Singapore has begun to attract students from China only recently and their adjustment, with its many facets, has yet to be studied more closely and comprehensively as it may be peculiar only to Singapore.

Another facet of general adjustment is linked to education and academic pursuits, which also provide an important context for their experiences. Jackson (2006) mentions that 'context is where the students get the experiences to fulfill their expectations' (p. 162)



and one of the contexts mentioned by her informants is 'education' (p. 163). As these informants are in Singapore for the purpose of academic study, they spend most of their time in school, and adjusting to the academic environment is a task they have to take on as part of the total adjustment process. In this study, there are several perceptions of studying in Singapore but which are related to size of the school, teacher support and how English is taught, and these are significant because they are related to their adjustment as a whole. This is confirmed by other researchers who say that, although most international students perceive limited language skills as the most significant source of their academic problems (Jochems *et al.*, 1997), there are a number of factors that affect academic success and satisfaction (Ward, Furnham and Bochner, 2001). Such factors can range from intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to cross-cultural differences in educational expectations and practices (Chen, 1994; Irvine and York, 1995 in Ward, Furnham and Bochner, 2001). For these informants, the expectations are in the cross-cultural differences in education approach,

5. 'My father decided to send me here because the education here is similar to the western way.' (S.6/M).

The student views the 'western way' of learning English in terms of how differently it is learned in China. Although the researcher is well aware of the typical model of learning English in China's schools, review of past research reveals that there are fundamental differences in not only learning styles but perceptions of learning. Jin and Cortazzi (1998) propound that,

'...Chinese learners share...clear and long-standing cultural perceptions of what it means to be Chinese and of how to learn. In contrast, 'western' cultures of learning share a different set of norms, perceptions and ideals – at least, they do so in the eyes of very many Chinese, whatever the actual differences between, say, British, American or Australian cultures.' (p. 102)

Interview data in section 4.6.2, statements 1 and 2, also show some evidence that the informants believe they would be learning English in a promoting environment, ‘We heard it has good environment to learn English’ and ‘Coming to learn *correct* English as it can be different to China’s English’. The view of ‘different’ therefore seems to have a positive connotation.

The western way of learner-centred and task-based learning styles may seem different for the informants but it is what they came to learn and acquire. Once exposed to the differences, they also realise they are influenced by a highly structured culture of language learning, as in China, which is primarily concerned with ‘mastery of knowledge (including knowledge of skills) which is focused on achieving knowledge of grammar and vocabulary.’ (ibid, p. 102). Burnett and Gardner (2006), in their research on the experience of Chinese students in a UK university, observed one of their student-informants ‘felt that the very teaching philosophy in Britain compared to China was a major challenge’ (p. 83), but that the ‘interactive approach to learning (in Britain) was overall a very positive experience’ (p. 84). This research shows that, for PR China students, the teaching of English in China is traditionally grammar-based, and that the western way is not only a novel way to learn language but one that is seen as desirable. Even those who are unused to the comparatively smaller class and school sizes are positive about how English is taught,

6. ‘When I came to CAE, I felt a little disappointed because it is much smaller than I imagined before. As you know, China is very big, even a university may be like a small city. But I feel better now as the teachers are very good and though the school is small but (it) has complete equipments. Also, the way of teaching is pretty good for us.’ (S. 7/M)

The student seems well-adjusted to the new *way of teaching* even though it has been said that international students often have difficulty adjusting to their new academic environment. Paige (1990) remarks that international students can be also disoriented by the educational system and points out that the learning styles of the students may not ‘fit

the new learning environment.’ (p. 167). Although such different cultural styles of learning and teaching can be hindrances (Jin and Cortazzi, op.cit.), the informants have a positive theory of learning adjustment, well-supported in their written assessment of the learning styles as well as their interpretation of what is effective teaching in the school.

Having close ties with others in school also provides the support functions that promote further adjustment,

7. So, I feel better than before because they (non-PR China friends at school) are friendly and kind. Especially the teachers of the CAE are very helpful who come from different countries. I’m very happy to study in this school, and I decided to continue studying in this school because the purpose is that I can pass the English examination.’ (S.1/F)

It is important in the minds of the informants to have both non-Chinese speaking friends at school as well as teacher support to promote their learning adjustment. In fact, Adelman (1988) explains that close ties (e.g. close friends) and weak ties (e.g. acquaintances with school teachers) provide important informational support functions, and it has been speculated that often it is the latter connections that may help newcomers solve their everyday problems. Moreover, it is true that PR China students often expect the teacher to be ‘sensitive to any need for help and to offer it (unasked) when it was needed.’ (Jin and Cortazzi, 1998: 106). For the researcher, the experiences of teaching PR China students have proved helpful often in understanding their typical needs, and thus in making more attempts to meet them in order to encourage learning

Ward, Furnham and Bochner (2001) make the assertion that the educational environment is a ‘microcosm of the larger society and reflects its values, traditions and practices.’ (p. 156) Therefore, just as they have to learn the general rules and skills for adjusting to life in the new culture, the students must also develop the ability to apply those to their academic setting. These informants not only learn English in a different language-learning setting but also have to deal with adjusting to the new pedagogies of their

institution. Even though there are differences in the language teaching and learning ‘ways’ between China and Singapore, the students have found this to be promoting instead of impeding their learning, and it is possible, therefore, that their positive outlook towards it lead to a theory of successful learning adjustment.

These written accounts summarise their views that adjustment can be affected by conditions related to the weather and education. While they find it difficult to adjust to the weather, they are by contrast pleased with the new language learning methodologies to which they have been exposed in school. Moreover, they view that their learning has been aided in part by social networks and teachers. However, there are varying accounts of adjustment in these written accounts, and the next section discusses that such individual differences in appraisals can be the result of self-efficacy as a personality construct and how it plays a part in the differing theories.

#### 4.7.3 Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is defined by Bandura (1977) as the ‘conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce outcomes’ (p. 193). In Tsang’s (2001) research, it is a personality construct related to general and interaction adjustments, where some statement-items that show high levels of self efficacy are: I feel pretty sure that my life would turn out the way I want it to be; I can overcome problems experienced in my life easily; I love challenges. Some of the students in this study write along similar lines,

8. ‘ Even though it’s hard to enter government school (in Singapore), I’m not disappointed. I know I will be admitted by the government (school system) only if I study English well. Now my English is not good enough. I have to study English hard.... I (am) determined to stay in Singapore and continue my study.’  
(S. 13/F)

This student believes in her own abilities to overcome obstacles, and understands that hard work will pay off if she applies herself to learning English, realising that the

frustration-triumph ride is part of the sojourning journey. By being aware and keeping track of her goal of entering the local school system, she retains realistic expectations if that outcome is to be realised. Similarly, another student writes,

9. ‘ Although I have met some troubles and will meet them further, I don’t regret the chance to go abroad. I have only one way which I chose. What I can do is trying my best to do everything.’ (S. 6/M)

As the only way to make a successful adjustment and achieve his academic goal, the student believes that he must manage his stay by doing his best, in spite of any trouble he may encounter along the way. What helps him meet the challenges ahead, he keeps to realistic expectations, while others may find transition experiences threatening. Some researchers have argued that realistic expectations, i.e. those that match actual experiences, facilitate adjustment, a theory which is consistent with stress and coping literature that has highlighted the negative consequences of unexpected stress (Ward, Furnham and Bochner, 2001). According to Ting-Toomey (1999), sojourners need to ‘understand the peaks and valleys, and positive and negative shifts...in an unfamiliar environment...’ (p. 251) which explains why this student is aware he must not lose motivation and sight of his goals. Also, Tsang (2001) suggests that that ‘individuals can adjust their behaviour to better correspond to the expectations. This process will therefore facilitate adjustment’ (p. 8).

Evidence of positive attitude is evident in statements 16 and 17, section 4.6.2 in the interview data, showing that some informants are more inclined to making friends, acquiring knowledge about local culture and finding ways to improve their language skills, ‘ I like to know about the way people think about different issues. I have to talk to them if I want to know. It’s my personality. I have many local friends.’ and ‘ I have to try to approach local people. They are important to give you information about local culture. And you can practice your English. Some brought me around (Singapore)’. In adjustment literature, personality is usually treated as a predictor variable, and such theories have

shown that extraversion and sensitivity, for example, are thought to facilitate adjustment (Gardner, 1962).

As individuals process stress-related information in a variety of ways, other informants find that adjustment is a difficult process,

10. ‘ Now I have lived in Singapore I think it’s very boring and I always feel lonely. My parents and friends are all in China. I miss them very much. I still feel that Singapore is strange to me.’ (S. 11/M)

While life can be manageable for some, others view it as a boring and lonely experience. Self-efficacy explains why one student adjusts as another does not, but it is rarely studied in international adjustment research despite its obvious relevance (Tsang, 2001). In their Model of Intercultural Adjustment, Parker and McEvoy (1993) include self efficacy as an individual variable and hypothesize that it is related to adjustment in that it ‘may be predictive of cross cultural adjustment’ (p. 361). A comprehensive study conducted by Chataway and Berry (1989) investigated the coping styles, satisfaction and psychological distress of Chinese students in Canada. They used Folkman and Lazarus’ (1985) Ways of Coping Scale that includes the assessment of 8 distinct coping strategies: problem solving, wishful thinking, detachment, social support, positive thinking, self-blame, tension reduction and withdrawal responses. Research results revealed a significant relationship between coping styles and satisfaction in dealing with problems, and that Chinese students who engaged in positive thinking were more satisfied with their ability to cope; however, those who showed withdrawal and wishful thinking were less content with the way they managed their problems. Such research show that students who engage in positive thinking adjust to their new environment.

As expected, students who rely more on strategies such as avoidance or mental and behavioural disengagement (Carver, Scheier and Weintraub, 1989) can have problems with adjustment,

11. ‘ But I’m feeling very sore now. Because I feel lonely. On the one hand someone

looks like he's Chinese on the road. But he doesn't speak Chinese, just only English. I can't talk with them. On the other hand in my home town, however I don't stray. But when I arrived in Singapore everywhere looks like the same. I always feel afraid of maze when I stray in the bus!' ( S. 16/F)

By *sore*, the student explains she is upset, or *jǔ sàng* in Chinese. That she is upset and lonely is due to the fact that she finds contact and friendship with local Chinese difficult, seeing them as ethnically similar yet different in speech, or accent. According to Furnham and Bochner (1982), it is possible, in this case, that two cultures 'may be similar on one factor (e.g. sex role relationships) and very different on others ( e.g. non-verbal communication)' (p. 171). Sometimes problems can arise because of the culture from which the stranger originates, and it is therefore useful to consider that culture to comprehend his or her adjustment difficulties (Furnham and Bochner, 1982). While cultural similarity between China and Singapore should facilitate adjustment, it does not, in this instance, help the student adjust any faster. In fact, she continues but ends her account by pointing out that one may be more attractive than the other,

12. ' When I arrived in Singapore I heard a joke. The joke was if you want to go abroad, you'd better go to Singapore. Because Singapore has sunshine and beautiful (people). But a returning student (might) say, ' Sunshine is very nice, it is 40°. Beautiful people are very beautiful. But if you see a beauty, she is always from China.'

When asked about the meaning of 'stray' (statement 11), the student says she means getting lost, or *mí lù* in Chinese, and to her, living in an indistinct and unremarkable landscape, makes her disoriented and afraid of being lost. All her group members go through the same transitions but not all have stressful experiences; while some find their new situation challenging, others find it threatening. Tsang (2001) explains such individual differences within a self-efficacy framework, that individuals with high self-efficacy would take on challenges and cope with uncertainty. The link to adjustment is further established in a study by Nicholson and Imaizumi (1993), who found a significant

relationship between self-efficacy and role-innovation, one of the two modes of adjustment. Similarly, section 4.6.2 in the interview data show varying accounts of adjustment with regard to interaction, with some making strong attempts to encourage interaction and social ties and others being withdrawn and disengaged, '(I am) worried about not learning English because...how to practice my speaking skill. It is weak. I only speak to PRC people.' and ' Learning in school isn't enough. We only do exercises in coursework. No opportunities outside. If I don't learn English, I will go home (to China). I can't live here anymore.'

Explained within the self-efficacy framework, there is a better understanding as to why there are differing theories of adjustment to the same factors. While everyone shares the same feelings about the weather, they differ among themselves on matters of general life events and activities. Even though there are varying accounts of adjustment like those in the interview data, the written accounts on general adjustment have been positive for the most part. It is possible the informants are apprehensive about providing a written record of their views on what concerns them and how they adjust to certain factors of general adjustment. Despite this reservation, the written accounts have raised, however, issues not found in the interview data, thus further enriching their theories of adjustment. In particular, the analysis in terms of self-efficacy has added a further explanatory factor to the account. However, this is not inherently part of the students' theories. They explain their success or failure in adjustment in terms of the environment, rather than in terms of their own personality, and in this respect, the use of the self-efficacy factor is from the researcher's perspective rather than the students', and therefore, self-efficacy has not been used in the analysis of interview data.

#### 4.7.4 Interaction Adjustment

In this section, interaction adjustment is defined by the informants' perceptions of interaction and communication they have with nationals from their own country, Singaporeans and other nationals. Within these social networks, Bochner *et al.* 1986) identify three types that are developed by international students in their host culture:



monocultural (home culture/ethnic), bicultural (host culture) and multicultural (other foreigners). Many authors have considered extensive social interactions with host nationals a desirable condition for effective sojourner adjustment (Davis, 1971; Klineberg and Hull, 1979), but Ward (1996) warns that, unfortunately, the relationship between contact and adjustment is not always straightforward. The informants show, however, that they are satisfied with their friendship with others,

1. 'As well, I have recognized many friends whom are Singaporean, another city of China, Malaysian, Brazilian, etc. So I feel better than before because they are friendly and kind. ((S.4/F)

By *recognized*, the student means she has *met* many friends during her sojourn, and believes her friendship network with Chinese, Malaysian and Brazilian nationals is a promoting factor because it provides the social support needed to adjust to a new life that had proved difficult at first. Another is also pleased with her friendship networks, 'I have more and more friends that come from different countries'. Ting-Toomey, 1999 explains that such bonds that include bicultural and multicultural networks can help to enrich mutual learning processes. However, Ward, Furnham and Bochner (2001) claim that although all three types of networks can provide both informational and social support, host-national networks are preferred for 'tangible, instrumental assistance'. Studies (e.g. Ward and Kennedy, 1993) have consistently found that the 'frequency and quality of personal contacts between the locals and newcomers increase adaptive satisfaction and perceived competence' (in Ting-Toomey, 1999:243), and that multicultural contact too can also promote adjustment. Differing theories come from research from Wiseman (1997) and Nowack and Weiland (1998), finding that despite the benefits of host nationals, this is the least salient of the three networks. In the written work, there is no evidence to suggest that the informants prefer one type of network over the other. The general feeling here is that all three networks affect their well-being. In fact, some researchers have concerned themselves with the adequacy, rather than the source, of social support and its influence on cross-cultural adaptation (Ward, Furnham and Bochner, 2001).

What differs with the interview accounts is that the students report more satisfaction with social contact in their written statements. It is possible that some students believe the written accounts can be incriminating and write more cautiously. They seem to be happier and more satisfied,

2. ‘ I have to study English hard...I am determined to stay in Singapore and continue my study.’ (S. 16/F)
3. ‘ I adapted to...the school gently. I have made some friends and got used to them very well. Now, every day I always have a good mood and I’m happy to study in there. I think I would do better.’ (S.12/M)

It is also possible that they have had more time to reflect on their interaction experiences and found that it was not so bad after all. Overall, most of the accounts on interaction report satisfaction and feelings of well-being. .

With the exception of two statements, the informants reported more concern and dissatisfaction in the interview data with the quantity of interaction with others. Statements 16 and 17 in section 4.6.2.2 indicate how the informants perceive their sojourn to be more satisfying, as by creating their own opportunities for interaction and friendship they have gained social and practical support needed for adjustment to the new environment. Ong (2000) developed the Index of Sojourner Social Support based on international students and business people in Singapore and found that the availability of social support is related to sojourners’ satisfaction with social support and lower levels of depression. It indicates that students seek social support to provide the necessary information to help orient them to the new surroundings. However, the significance of the perceived availability needs more attention in future research. The rest of the interview data (section 4.6.2, statements 18 to 23) on interaction adjustment indicates the informants are dissatisfied with the lack of interaction opportunities, ‘ Learning in school

isn't enough. We only do exercise in coursework. No opportunities outside. If I don't learn English, I will go home (to China). I can't live here anymore.' Such remarks represent contrasting views with those in the written accounts

In spite of this, the written accounts show an overall satisfaction with interaction with others in monocultural, bicultural and multicultural situations. They enriched the overall theory of interaction adjustment because of their value as an account that rationalizes their thinking, decisions (reasons for studying abroad or in Singapore), actions and feelings during the sojourn. They differ with the interview data to a large extent in their report but some merit must be given to them as they explain how they are able to adjust through maintaining interaction with others.

#### 4.8 Chapter summary

The methodological approach of this study involves the use of grounded theory to explore, analyse and interpret the data. As such, the study was able to deal with the question of how the informants know and perceive things, and interpret, understand and define the social world around them to arrive at their theories of intercultural adjustment. However, although new concepts and theories have formed, the research has been influenced, to a large extent, by existing research and theories, making the analysis an ongoing process between theory building and literature reviewing.

The data were collected through structured and unstructured focus-group interviews, written work and questionnaires. Mumford's (1998) Culture Shock Questionnaire was administered but was not useful in providing further support for the other data nor found to enrich the study. Together with the interview data, the written accounts and General Background Questionnaire helped to generate the theory that adjustment for the informants is either facilitated or impeded by factors related to the environment, interaction and other intercultural experiences.

In general adjustment, their theory is abstracted from their beliefs that certain pertinent factors in their new environment help promote their adjustment. Those encounters and experiences relate to accommodation, food, weather and general environmental factors, such as the landscape, the roads, etc, and prove to have been positive episodes for some informants during their sojourn.

However, intercultural adjustment is not without its problems and three quarters of the group show they encounter difficulty in adjusting to the same general adjustment aspects, describing some feelings as homesick, worried, dissatisfied, stressed, etc.

These theories of adjustment generally have confirmed the relevance of those factors in previous studies, where many researchers have relied on a combination of conceptual and empirical approaches to describe and define adjustment. Such analytical frameworks have emerged from work by researchers such as Black and Stephens (1989), who identified three facets of sojourner adjustment: general, interaction and work adjustments. Other researchers also concentrated on domain-specific types of adjustment, such as studies from Lance and Richardson (1985), Ayman and Berry (1996), Lese and Robbins (1994), where the common theme in the models of intercultural adjustment is the recognition that psychological well-being and satisfaction as well as effective relationships with host members are important components of adjustment. In this way, this study's theories are generated through the use of existing theory as well as research in comparable settings, and in particular, those conducted in Asian regions by researchers such as Ward and Kennedy (1993), Tsang (2001), Lam (2006) and others. The written data are treated separately as they appear as the students' ruminations, documenting their experiences from the time prior to their departure to the time the data were collected. The accounts summarise the view that adjustment is affected by conditions in the environment but these are varied, which is explained within the self-efficacy framework.

Interaction adjustment consists of the informants' experiences as they interact with and engage in the host culture. Existing theory views that adjustment comes from intercultural contact that promotes good will and understanding between members of two

different cultures (Brislin, 1981), and Kim (2001) refers to 'intercultural communicative competence' as the ability to acquire the competence to interact in many social contexts in the new environment (p. 98). The informants show they are concerned with the quantity and quality of interaction they have with local Singaporeans, and that interaction adjustment can be hampered by the incomprehensible *Singlish* as well as lack of opportunities for meaningful interaction and learning. The written accounts nevertheless show an overall satisfaction with interaction in three settings: with host members, conationals and other nationals. It is possible that such accounts reflecting their adjustment is due to the informants believing that written records can be potentially incriminating, and therefore did not want to describe their sojourn as negative.

Their adjustment to new aspects of the culture reveals how the informants view similarities and dissimilarities between their culture and the host culture. Most of the informants perceive that local Singaporeans are prejudiced against them, often making them feel foreign and different, in aspects ranging from politics to clothing. However, despite the ethnic and cultural proximity of both the PR Chinese and Singaporean Chinese, the study shows it is not a determinant of successful intercultural adjustment. In fact, they find their circumstances more confusing than facilitating, and attribute the problem to their ignorance of many facets of the new culture (such as history and local beliefs).

The analysis establishes the theory that adjustment is predicated on environment factors that either facilitated or hindered it, and that the intercultural experiences have been inherently stressful, in spite of varying accounts of adjustment. Despite being grounded in its own data, it has built on existing intercultural adjustment theory and what is already known of the phenomenon. However, applying theory and the research findings to solve the kinds of problems that result from intercultural contact and change is not possible without further investigation of the phenomenon, particularly in the context of PR China students to Singapore, where cultural similarities have shown that adjustment problems still arise. The following chapter will discuss the suggestion that this phenomenon be

further investigated and also how students can be better prepared for their sojourn abroad, particularly in the case of those from PR China in Singapore.

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

The aim of this study has been primarily to provide an account and analysis of its phenomena while retaining a sense of the complexity and nuance that comes with the tasks. Imposing a linear order helps to reconstruct the multifaceted and multidimensional body of data into a clear account but it is inevitable that it is imperfect and partial in so far as it is limited to those aspects relevant to the informants' setting, and situated only within certain aspects of the general phenomenon. Presenting a conclusion therefore also involves omitting many details, insights and complexities, but the decisions to omit topics, themes or issues are made with respect to the central theme or focus and the task remains importantly one of selecting those aspects that are relevant to the particular issues and tasks that this chapter attempts to address.

### 5.1 The research questions

At the heart of this study is the pursuit of answers for the set of research questions and its ability to operationalize them to arrive at a valid response framed within a sound research of intercultural adjustment. The question of what the influencing factors are is discussed here in conjunction with how they promote or hinder adjustment; this emphasizes the importance of such factors because of their effect on the informants and, from a research point of view, how each question is closely related to the other. Inherent in those factors and their affective outcomes are some peculiar aspects unique to the context of student sojourn in Singapore, which have raised interesting theories where the informants themselves believe such factors are relevant to their life in the new environment, and the extent to which they adjusted to them. Furthermore, connections with established theory and research are discussed to indicate how the study had drawn upon related literature to help illuminate it, and even if some topics are scarcely addressed, further research in specific areas can inform the phenomenon. The following research questions that had been addressed are:

1. *What factors affect and influence the students in their adjustment to life in Singapore?*
2. *To what extent do these factors hinder or promote their adjustment?*
3. *Are there aspects peculiar only in the context of adjustment to Singapore?*
4. *To what extent would the students' theory of adjustment be able to draw upon established theories of intercultural adjustment?*

Some affecting and influencing factors are organized into a General Adjustment domain, which is the best descriptor of what was going on, namely those issues and concerns of the informants with certain aspects of the environment. This construct of factors is similar to those used by Black and Stephens (1989) and Tsang (2001) who, in studying the adaptive changes of strangers to a new environment, consider numerous general adjustment aspects ranging from tastes for different foods to social values and attitudes toward the host culture. However, both studies use quantitative measures of analysis which provide findings that indicate if adjustment is affected by different factors, but other more recent studies by Jackson (2006), Tarp (2006) and an Asian study by Lam (2006) use a combination of qualitative methods of collection and analysis to arrive at a better understanding of the cultural learning process. Similarly, this study uses a qualitative approach to tease out and collect those factors that not only particularly concern the students but also their perceptions, attitudes and behaviour. This approach is also largely influenced by Ward, Furnham and Bochner's model (2001) of culture shock that explicitly distinguishes three components of the process: Affect, Behaviour and Cognitions, that is, how they feel, behave, think and perceive when exposed to second culture influences.

The attempt to unearth factors influencing general adjustment has resulted in a list of items related to their physical environment, ranging from the weather to accommodations. Such are the physical aspects that are, in their perspective, of the most concern and worry during their sojourn. The examination of these factors has also referred to the factor analysis instrument of Crano and Crano (1993), whose Student Adjustment Strain, where the respondents had to consider if a particular item was a



personal strain for them, is a noteworthy example of standardized measures of problems experienced by international students. Unlike that research, this study's informants did not have to face a long list of such factors, relevant or not, but to talk about the ones that concerned them most. The study therefore is richer in terms of general adjustment factors, i.e. those factors in the environment that are particularly pertinent and how they affect the informants, contributing the answers to its research questions. Mainly, it can be said that a quarter of the informants have adjusted to those factors while the rest continues to have ongoing problems and stress, where these conventional culture shock issues are reported by them to precipitate more strain than in other areas.

Illuminating the theory of interaction adjustment are the research by Sellitz *et al.* (1963) and Kim (1988) who show that strangers express strong need for general cultural orientation through communication with host members, and by Bochner, Buker and McLeod (1976), Bochner, McLeod and Lin (1977) and Bochner and Orr (1979), who explain that international students tend to rely on social networks for cultural learning. The interaction aspects that specifically concern the informants in this study are in two basic areas, the quantity of interaction with locals and other non-PR China nationals, and the quality of the interaction, where these aspects range from the opportunities for interaction to the pronunciation of English-speaking Singaporeans. The findings here show that, while there are two contrasting student theories on their interaction adjustment, they generally experience difficulty in understanding the local form of English, Singlish, and that it is a barrier to acquiring and improving language skills in the host environment, where their sole purpose is to expand those skills. Local literature such as that of Gupta (1994), presents an explanation that Singlish is a low variety of English used mainly in its spoken form and has largely been influenced by Chinese dialects (such as Hokkien, Cantonese and Teochew) as well as Malay and Tamil. Another local study such as Young's (2003), of PR Chinese students taking an intensive English course at a university in Singapore, used questionnaires and quantitative analysis as research methods to investigate Chinese students' attitudes towards this form of English. In this study, it was also found that the students have difficulties understanding the English

language used by Singaporeans. In this sense, local literature has provided more insight into the causes of the informants' difficulty in interaction with locals.

With regard to methods used in discovering more interaction problems and why they could not adjust, a combination of methods (e.g. interviewing, written accounts) was used so as to allow the informants more opportunities to elaborate on their perspectives of those interaction factors that impede adjustment and how their confusion and frustration are caused by their being unfamiliar with the slang, idiom and metaphors that are highly contextual to Singapore. As such they do not feel encouraged to participate more in interaction with host nationals, and believe that the lack of meaningful and beneficial interaction with them has hindered their adjustment to life here. However, analysis has also revealed that a group of informants do not reject local English and believe that, in order to overcome such problems, they have to persevere in their attempts to initiate communication with host nationals and also create opportunities for more encounters. A discussion of self-efficacy as a personality construct is included as a way of explaining why there are differing theories of adjustment to the same factors. However, this is not part of the students' theories but rather from the researcher's perspective.

Although the informants' perceived adjustment can be hampered by limited language opportunities and meaningful interaction, there is a number of other factors that impinge on adjustment and the satisfaction with their sojourn in the new environment. The studies by Dunbar (1994) and Torbiorn (1982) have informed this study in terms of how low cultural distance between sojourners and host cultures facilitates adjustment, and also Kim's (1988) study which posits that strangers from a culture similar to the host begin their adjustment process with a greater advantage. However, these informants have found that, in spite of ethnic and racial similarities, they found differences in areas relating to culture, history, beliefs, ideology, language and clothes, to the extent that they perceive these factors hinder adjustment. This study draws on the research of Selmar and Shiu (1999) and Tsang (2001), to explain that, in spite of a common cultural heritage, similarities seem to aggravate adjustment problems; likewise, this study reveals that those factors perceived to be different and new to the informants, actually hinder adjustment.

In fact, it is the differences in the educational system of Singapore that attract the PR students to Singapore, where their aim is to acquire better language skills in order to advance to tertiary-level education. With regard to this aspect, this study has been informed by Burnett and Gardner's (2006) research on the experience of Chinese students in a UK university, where the interactive approach to learning (in Britain) was in general a very positive experience. Based on such studies as well as the informants' own theories, this study is therefore able to conclude that this factor actually promotes their satisfaction with how English is learned and acquired. Even those who mention they are unused to the comparatively smaller class and school size are positive about how English is taught.

## 5.2 The present study and existing theories and empirical findings

The review of much of the literature related to the phenomenon covers important existing theories as well as empirical findings that form the cornerstone of intercultural adjustment. On the one hand, it has offered competing theoretical frameworks for the analysis of intercultural adjustment in this study; on the other, only a few appear clearly to dominate it, but it can be said that there are no grand theories guiding this study except the few that are mentioned. In summary, the research findings reported here, when compared with previous research, have aspects which are not only guided by but also complement existing empirical findings and support pertinent existing theories, namely those in: Furnham and Bochner's (1986) study on the problems of overseas students; Ward and colleagues' (1990 – 1992) study on intercultural adaptation and its psychological and sociocultural domains; Black and Stephens's (1989)'s study on the three facets of sojourner adjustment; Babiker *et al.*'s (1980) and Crano and Crano's (1993) studies on culture distance factors and student strain; Sellitz *et al.*'s (1963) and Kim's (1988) model of stress-adjustment-growth dynamics; and Selmer and Shiu's (1999) and Tsang's (2001) studies on adjustment difficulties of sojourners with similar cultural aspects with the host environment. Although not complete, this list consists of those findings and theories most relevant and complementary to this study's findings. They explain the phenomenon of intercultural adjustment, where their theoretical function has provided the means to describe and account for the responses of this study's

informants to their new and novel cultural environment, and by and large give support to the conclusion here that their adjustment process is inherently stressful.

### 5.3 Some new aspects of intercultural adjustment in the present study

As each person's adjustment experiences are unique to some extent (Gudykunst and Kim, 2003), it is inevitable that the findings here also include new aspects that differ from and are not found in previous research, namely:

- That despite a common cultural heritage (ethnic and linguistic) between the PR China students and local Chinese Singaporeans, the informants found their adjustment process fraught with difficulties, such as the inability to understand and adjust to customs related to religion, politics, and physical behaviour. The study of Selmer and Shiu (*ibid*) explains that adjustment difficulties arise in spite of common cultural aspects shared by both sojourners and host members, but it was not conducted in the Singapore context and its informants were not students with problems that affect student-sojourners. Tsang's (*ibid*) study, although on PR China students in Singapore, did not specify how his respondents felt about each aspect of difficulty
- That they associated most of their adjustment problems with the physical aspects of the environment (e.g. the weather, the food, the roads), and although these can be found in the scales and lists of adjustment factors in other research, such as Crano and Crano's (1993) representing items of personal strain for international students, this study's findings reveal items peculiar to the situation of Singapore, such as the sub-tropic heat or the common spicy food found mostly in the diet of most local people. Such factors are of deep concern to the students as all of them expressed difficulty in adjusting to them.
- That interaction adjustment depends on the quantity and quality of their interaction with locals in the new environment, which supports Gudykunst and Kim's (2003) explanation that the quantity and quality of individual strangers' communicative relationships with the host environment are 'influenced by the

interplay of factors attributable to both the strangers and the conditions of the environment' (p. 373). These aspects here are affected by two factors: the common low-variety spoken English towards which the students have negative attitudes, and the lack of meaningful and beneficial practice and interaction they have with locals. These two factors may have made their adjustment problematic.

This study thus offers a few more insights into the intercultural adjustment of international students, and in particular in an Asian region. Its theory of adjustment is largely influenced by the characteristics and conditions peculiar to the setting, whose informants, ethnic aspects, physical environment, interaction aspects, and psychological and sociocultural aspects, all work to represent its own particular illustration of intercultural adjustment. It has attempted to contribute to intercultural adjustment theory by looking at the cultural-similarity hypothesis showing that it is not necessarily a determinant of successful adjustment. Although other research has already supported this finding, the causes and conditions for problematic adjustment in this study are different and idiosyncratic, yet relevant to adjustment theory.

#### 5.4 Implications of the findings

In this study, the differing student theories of adjustment to several factors explain how the PR China students experience life in Singapore. Even though the students are homogenous in several general aspects: country of origin, language, and education background, there are apparent but expected differences in backgrounds and personalities. The data therefore not only show that the informants come from diverse regions or provinces of China but also show a diversity in student views, beliefs and theories of adjustment in terms of how the factors have promoted or hindered their adjustment, the particular aspects peculiar to the context of these students who share a common cultural heritage with Singapore, and how these findings relate to those in past and current research on intercultural adjustment.

The diverse theories of adjustment may in fact indicate that the data are inadequate for a more detailed exploration of the areas related to the variation in adjustment so that this variation can be explained. However, in an attempt to explain it, section 4.7.3 discusses to some extent that individuals, having different personalities, would have varying attitudes towards their adjustment. In adjustment literature, self-efficacy is regarded by researchers as a personality construct or factor associated with general adjustment, psychological well-being or life satisfaction (Ward, Furnham and Bochner, 2001), and may explain why there are varying accounts of adjustment in this group of informants. However, although literature on the influence of personality on the adjustment process contains a poor showing of personality in the prediction of cross-cultural adjustment, many researchers and observers believe that it is premature to dismiss its influence. Nevertheless, this study's data are insufficient to indicate that the variation in adjustment is due to differing backgrounds and personalities.

It is also difficult to draw firm conclusions on the variation in adjustment from the data collected over eight months. Looking at longitudinal studies, one sees that the focus concentrates on two basic themes: predicting cross-cultural and education adjustment by pre-departure variables and monitoring psychological and sociocultural changes over time. However, this study is not conducted as longitudinal investigation and is therefore limited by its design; also, the circumstances and backgrounds of the informants do not correspond to those in other research, and from which this study can draw supportive evidence. That is, although the informants as students are accessible for investigation throughout the study, none have had prior traveling experience, as revealed in the general background questionnaire, in that they have not been abroad nor resided for extended lengths of time outside their own countries. Therefore the data reveal little as they focus mainly on the factors that promote or hinder adjustment and are not used for a longitudinal study.

The findings also show that the study lacks the generalisability that big samples can provide; this study's data provided by the sample of informants can only be an indication of their responses rather than those of all the students in the school. However, following

the strategy of grounded theory, it was important to sample, not only in terms of people but also in terms of what was relevant to and meaningful for the emerging theory of adjustment from the informants. The key was to ensure that there is a level of abstraction of important beliefs and concepts so as to refine their idea of adjustment. It is also important to sample in terms of context, where informant behaviour can be influenced by contextual factors. Although the factors that influence their adjustment are mostly outside the school context (e.g. weather, housing, interaction with host nationals), the informants have not been interviewed in all their locations. In order to fully understand those factors that impinge on their adjustment, it would have been more useful to observe the informants in a variety of contexts and also at different times. Another reason for the data not being generalisable enough is that it is possible that responses are particular to this group of students. Although they may not represent what others outside the group think and believe, it is possible that, according to Bryman (2001), a larger group or more groups may increase the complexity of the analysis. A group of this size, therefore, enabled the researcher to glean personal accounts, which is the goal of the interviews. However, although the informants were involved and preoccupied with specific topics all the time during the interviews, the intensity and interest would flag after a while and the involvement started to taper off, and all that was heard were numerous but brief statements. It became difficult then to stimulate discussion to elicit more responses.

Despite the limitations of this study in terms of its inadequacy to explore the variation in adjustment between the informants with different backgrounds and personalities, and across eight months of research, all the issues driving the study have been attempted and explored. The results point towards the research questions that ask why the students encounter problems of adjustment to their new life in Singapore, where the difficulty lies in their being unfamiliar with several physical environmental aspects and the social and cultural conventions of the host culture. Despite theoretical expectations and unequivocal evidence in most research that cultural similarity promotes adjustment, many instances of confusion and strain are found to exist for the students here. The implications for this conclusion are in two main areas:

For research...

Much research has been done with regard to cultural similarity and there is already an extensive body of empirical evidence in support of the contention that it promotes adjustment in the new culture. However, Selmer and Shiu (1999) and Tsang (2001) point out that adjustment problems still arise despite cultural similarities. This suggests that, more research along similar lines be done in the case of Asian students on study sojourns in the Asian region, where most international students to Singapore, for example, come from PR China. While relating the present findings to existing literature on cultural similarity highlights that the present informants' theories are supported to some extent by literature, it is scarce and its development needs to be further promoted in terms of the kind of problems that arise, to what extent they affect general and interaction adjustment, and that it be well-documented so that such studies can extend understanding of existing literature with new dimensions.

Much of the work on the phenomenon is done through quantitative research methods, where main preoccupations have been the measurement, causality, generalization and replication of findings. It is therefore necessary that more is done to address adequately the issue of meaning, that is, what adjustment means to students, especially in a context where there are more cultural similarities than differences, in terms of influencing factors and, for research, how the awareness of such meanings can deepen understanding of the intercultural adjustment process.

Moreover, the step-wise theories, such as Oberg's (1960), dominating literature on culture shock in the past two decades are not specific about the nature or boundaries of those environmental and social cues that affect adjustment, although they have already long been criticized as being too broad and not amenable to empirical testing. However, later research showed that the most fundamental culture shock problems and difficulties experienced by strangers occur in social situations, episodes and transactions (Ward, Furnham and Bochner, 2001), and this is a theory supported by other studies, such as Lam's (2006) Asian research which delves into the adjustment problems that are derived



from the different cultural, social and self-perception of her Mainland China student sample. The implication is that unfamiliarity with aspects such as the physical, climatic, political, legal, educational, linguistic and sociocultural contribute to culture shock to a lesser degree. The salient aspects affecting the cross-cultural transition of these informants to Singapore, however, may show that it is possible that they are in fact no less important, but can be a major cause of stress. In addition to experiencing a wide range of difficulties associated with international student transitions, environmental problems such as the sub-tropical climate, the extreme flavour of food or even a commonly used local variety of English, for example, are strongly characteristic of the sort of ongoing problems that impinge significantly upon adjustment in such a context, thus affecting their psychological well-being and academic performance.

In fact, Ward and colleagues (e.g. Ward and Kennedy, 1999) have already expanded the Culture Learning theory to include additional adaptive skills, such as dealing with the climate and getting used to the local food in their Sociocultural Adaptation Scale, which has been systematically used in a developing programme of research. Similar research or social-situation difficulty scales could also be adapted to the Asian context, as it has been shown (e.g. Ward and Kennedy, 1999) that sociocultural adjustment may well vary across sojourning groups.

In terms of methodology, qualitative methods to study the phenomenon and more importantly Asian student samples that attribute their meaning to events and to their Asian environment, are best suited for identifying a potentially very wide range of influencing factors that go beyond social situations (e.g. interaction), episodes and transactions. Similar research such as Jackson's (2006) ethnographic study of an Asian student sample (15 Hong Kong students) in a UK university aimed to 'demystify the language and cultural learning experiences of student sojourners' (p. 156) can be conducted in the Asian region with similar goals for research as well as for the improvement of English language study and study abroad programmes for the students.

## 5.5 The need for intercultural training

There is sufficient evidence from research and literature, accumulated over several decades, to suggest that most people who travel to other countries and cross cultures would benefit from some kind of systematic preparation and training to help them cope with intercultural stress. The students in this study who cannot adjust and feel they have to return earlier than expected to China do not only represent a poor investment for their families but there is also a personal cost in terms of lowered self-esteem or general unhappiness and dissatisfaction. Therefore, not only is there ample empirical and theoretical justification for providing systematic training for such sojourners who are exposed to unfamiliar cultures but also strong evidence in this study for them to have such preparation.

Although the cultures of both students and host share many similarities, the students are still unprepared for many aspects of the new environment. This could be partly explained by the fact that they have had relatively little or no cultural training, as the students are privately supported by their families and therefore have not come to the notice of cultural trainers, such as those who deliver some form of cultural training programme set up by the government for sponsored students. Brislin and Yoshida (1994) claim that there are many benefits of intercultural training, e.g. an increase in 'world-mindedness' (in Ward, Furnham and Bochner (2001: 249). In the case of such privately-sponsored students, some pre-departure orientation is useful:

In China:

PR China students generally contact agents who represent different private and government academic institutions in Singapore, to apply for English Language study programmes. Such agents can arrange that short pre-departure workshops be conducted to orientate the students in 3 main areas:

- a. Singapore culture and history: this includes a brief history of the beginnings of the

country, the multicultural and diverse aspects of its population, including food, customs, dressing, and other environmental factors, such as the weather, landscape, etc.

- b. The language setting: this includes descriptions of its multi-lingual characteristics and the widely used local variety of English
- c. The English language learning approach: this includes brief explanation of the interactive learner-centred and task-based approach to language learning of language schools

There are several benefits from such training courses: understanding of the culture of Singapore and the cultural similarities and differences between both countries, increase in confidence to deal with cultural differences, greater enjoyment and satisfaction from intercultural interaction, more realistic expectations about academic and language skills goals and achievements, capacity to solve problems, decreased stress, decrease in stereotyping members of the host environment, and greater likelihood of thinking about the host culture in relation to their own.

For English Language Teaching and practice for Singapore...

Practical implications can be derived from the study's findings that, while there is an overall satisfaction with their present school in terms of its English Language programme, teaching styles, learning approaches and teaching staff, the PR China students are unfamiliar with and strongly disapprove of the low-variety English used commonly in Singapore, its linguistic characteristics and prevalent usage in daily life. Their attitudes have been predominantly negative towards the spoken form of Singapore English, with some students worried that they would not improve in their spoken English when there is insufficient meaningful interaction for practice. Moreover, when students go abroad to study English in settings where the language is used extensively in all segments of society, at work, socially and professionally, they usually have strong motivations for intercultural interactions (Bond, 1986) with host nationals so that they can improve their language skills or build friendship networks with locals and other

nationals. While it is not possible to help such students build friendship networks with local students or others of equal status in a private language school, where the entire student body is invariably from overseas, there are ways to raise awareness about the different forms of English.

In Singapore:

Most students arrive in the new environment with little or no knowledge of its culture, customs, and language setting, and while pre-departure workshops may help to orientate these students to the new culture, the process can be accelerated by language teachers introducing language materials and activities into lesson plans as part of integrating intercultural communication training into their teaching where the goal, therefore, is to enable the learners to become effective communicators as this would facilitate their adjustment to the new culture. With such training, students would be able to cope with and adjust to the requirements of their new cultures through the acquisition of an intercultural repertoire of interpersonal and social skills in order to interact effectively with their local counterparts. Although it is difficult to determine the characteristics of an effective intercultural communicator, Pusch (1981) offers a clear description,

‘This person is skillful at observing and interpreting cultural features of behaviour and displaying respect for other cultures and their people. Finally, this person is able to accept his or her own failures, understand his or her own cultural roots and their effect on personal behaviour, and has a well developed sense of humour’ (p. 99)

Language teachers in general, in the past, unfortunately have had little influence on the intercultural field (Baxter, 1983) and the role of teachers as ‘practitioners in intercultural training’ has been little recognized (p. 294). For the benefit of all PR China students learning English in Singapore, and if they are to become effective intercultural communicators, English Language teaching and intercultural training, therefore, should not be insulated one from the other.

Thus, as English language teachers, they need to be more aware of the literature on intercultural communication. Moreover, Kramsch (1998) notes that, by allowing students to become intercultural speakers, it means encouraging the teachers to see themselves too, as 'brokers between cultures of all kinds' (p.30). In such a role, they can, for example, incorporate activities into each skill, where familiarization takes place at the same time as language learning. A teacher introduces, for instance, Singlish words that are frequently used in daily real-life contexts, where students can familiarise themselves with how English is used in informal situations. Therefore, the teacher introduces variety-specific lexical items, and once they are familiar and aware of the meanings, they then 'translate' them into appropriate standard English words.

Not unlike the status of English in India, for example, *Standard English* in Singapore, according to Gupta (1994), or the high variety, is used in formal circumstances such as lectures, international communication and public speeches in Singapore, and are different 'only in terms of the phonological features and some culture specific lexical terms' (Young, 2003: 95). In India, English has also had a long history of institutionalized function and standing as a language of important roles in education, literary creativity and popular culture (Kachru and Nelson, 2000). Moreover, according to the writers just cited, it is also recognized as used in a complete range of interactional contexts across entire cultures. In Singapore, the low-variety Singlish is used entirely in the spoken context. As part of the intercultural communication training, students should have exposure to the standard variety at the same time as they become aware of differences in both varieties. To enhance listening skills, teachers can also introduce local TV programmes and explain colloquial expressions to the students. Once again, students can translate such expressions into standard English.

As the English language programmes become more geared to helping students become aware of the communication problems in intercultural interaction, they will also help them develop an acceptance of it as a variety used in informal situations and ways of coping with such problems. This would contribute in part to their overall adjustment to the new culture.

In summary, efforts to promote intercultural development can be directed most effectively towards the local centres and institutions who take in these overseas students, in particular from PR China as the number of these students studying in Singapore continues to increase. If successful, these places and their cultural programmes would help future students embrace better the intercultural world and its diversity, and tear down out-dated notions that may hinder their adjustment process.

**Appendix 1: Timeline of Data Collection**

APRIL, 2001	MAY, 2001	JULY, 2001
20 <sup>th</sup> April: 1 <sup>st</sup> interview 27 <sup>th</sup> April: Culture Shock Questionnaire	4 <sup>th</sup> May: 2 <sup>nd</sup> General Background Questionnaire 18 <sup>th</sup> May: 2 <sup>nd</sup> interview	6 <sup>th</sup> July: 3 <sup>rd</sup> interview
SEPTEMBER, 2001	NOVEMBER, 2001	
15 <sup>th</sup> September: 4 <sup>th</sup> interview	2 <sup>nd</sup> November: 5 <sup>th</sup> interview; request for written account	

**Appendix 2: The Culture Shock questionnaire**

No. of Students: 18  
Date: 27<sup>th</sup> April, 2001  
Length of time for questionnaire: 30 minutes  
Length of time for word explanation: 25 minutes  
Place: Classroom

Explanation of the following words:

strain	polite	shocking
generally	gestures	disgusting
accepted	facial expressions	powerless
local people	uncomfortable	find it an effort
anxious	stare	host
awkward	escape	most of the time
make sense of	confused	occasionally
helpless	role	not at all
cheat	identity	



Culture Shock Questionnaire	
A. "Core" Culture Shock Items	B. Interpersonal Stress Items
<p>1. Do you feel strain from the effort to adopt to a new culture? Most of the time Occasionally Not at all</p> <p>2. Have you been missing your friends and family back home? Most of the time Occasionally Not at all</p> <p>3. Do you feel generally accepted by the local people in the new culture? Most of the time Occasionally Not at all</p> <p>4. Do you ever wish to escape from your new environment? Most of the time Occasionally Not at all</p> <p>5. Do you ever feel confused about your role or identity in the new culture? Most of the time Occasionally Not at all</p> <p>6. Have you found things in your new environment shocking or disgusting? Most of the time Occasionally Not at all</p>	<p>1. Do you feel anxious or awkward when meeting local people? Most of the time Occasionally Not at all</p> <p>2. When talking to people, can you make sense of their gestures or facial expressions? Most of the time Occasionally Not at all</p> <p>3. Do you feel uncomfortable if people stare at you when you go out? Most of the time Occasionally Not at all</p> <p>4. When you go out shopping, do you feel as though people may be trying to cheat you? Most of the time Occasionally Not at all</p> <p>5. Are you finding it an effort to be polite to your hosts? Most of the time Occasionally Not at all</p>

The Culture Shock questionnaire ( Mumford, 1998)

### Appendix 3: General Background questionnaire

Data Document: General Background questionnaire (GBQ)  
Date: 4<sup>th</sup> May, 2001  
Length of time: 45 minutes – 1 hour  
Student: J.Z.  
Student identification no.: 2  
Document no.: GBQ 2

#### Section A

1. Please provide the information below:

Student: J. Z.  
Sex: Female  
Date of birth: 17/06/82  
City or province: Henan province  
Father's occupation: Land surveyor  
Mother's occupation: Supervisor  
Years of English study: 6 years

#### Section B

2. Reasons for choosing Singapore to learn English: *It is very near China and education is similar with UK. She is cheaper than other country and can communicate here than another foreign place.*

3. Did you know anything about Singapore before coming here?

*Not very much. Only like the upper answer. We could know about her history and about Singapore only from TV programmes in China.*

## Section C

4. Your opinion or view of learning English in this school, e.g. teaching method, teachers, etc.

*I heard that this is the best language school in Singapore and the teachers here are better than any others*

5. Do you usually speak English with other students in school?

*Sometimes. Not always. I want but they are all Chinese. Like me*

6. Do you usually speak with locals outside school?

*With landlord and when I go shopping. The environment to learn English is not very good, but there are many good English language schools.*

7. Do you have enough practice speaking English outside school, with local Singaporeans or others?

*Not enough practice because we only speak with the landlord.*

## Appendix 4: Group interview

### Excerpt A: Example of Group interview

Data: Group Interview (GI)  
No. of Interview: 1<sup>st</sup>  
Interviewees: 18 students  
Date: 20<sup>th</sup> April, 2001  
Place: School classroom  
Length: 1 hour 20 minutes (5.30pm – 6.50pm)  
Transcript document no.: GI.1

#### Interview question schedule:

##### A. School

- i. learning English
- ii. teachers } to learn about initial views/adjustment to learning English
- iii. adjustment?

##### Questions:

1. What are your views about learning English here so far?
2. Your impressions about the teaching style?
3. Do you think you have adjusted to the style of learning English here?

##### B. Social life outside school

- i. first impressions on arrival
- ii. factors in the environment that affect them } to learn about factors affecting
- iii. adjustment? them

##### Questions:

1. What were your first impressions when you arrived in Singapore?
2. What are the factors that affect you?
3. How do those factors affect your adjustment?

##### C. Interaction

- i. communication in English
- ii. with whom } to learn about English interaction factors: with
- iii. adjustment? whom, how often, when

##### Questions:

1. Do you communicate with others in English outside school?
2. Do you think it's good practice?
3. Is the interaction enough?

Interviewer: I

Informant: Inf.

I : What are your views about learning English?

Inf.1 : You mean about the school? Inside the school?

I. : Yes. You can talk about how different or similar it is to China

Inf..1 : It's quite different

Inf. 2 : Very different

I. : How different is it? Any views?

Inf. 1 : Well, good methods in teaching.

Inf. 3 : And there are good equipments for studying

I. : What else?

Inf. 2 : What we mean is coming to learn correct English as it can be different to China's English.

Inf. 4 : The teachers have good pronunciation

I. : Have you all adjusted so far to this way of learning?

(Most informants (about 15) agreed they've adjusted)

I : I'd like to talk about another topic, about your first impressions of Singapore.

The question is: How did you feel about being in Singapore when you first arrived here?

Inf.2 : Singapore is more developed than China...yes, I think so...

(There was some discussion in Chinese and some dissension)

I. : 'W', you don't agree, why not?

Inf. 5 : Because I think some parts of China are better, for many reasons

Inf. 6 : Singapore has safety...and beauty, and public order

Inf. 7 : Singapore is a strange place, and its language too, and the people when I first came. Gradually, I adjusted and was happier than before

I. : What are the particular factors in this 'strange' place (we'll talk about the language and people later, shall we?), that affect you: make you happy or unhappy?

Inf.7 : We think...the weather is problematic

(About 4 other informants nod in agreement)

Inf.8 : Can't accept weather

- I. : Can you say some more about why you can't accept the weather, or how the weather in Singapore makes you unhappy here?
- Inf. 5 : Worried about being able to adjust to the weather. I still can't. Maybe never...
- Inf. 9 : I think there are other factors. Many difference in food
- I. : You don't like the local food?
- Inf. 9 : I don't like hot spicy food, especially curry. Not used to it
- Inf. 10 : I didn't adjust because it's very hot and small
- I. : Let's talk about how you communicate with people in Singapore. Do you all speak English outside school?
- Inf.4 : Sometimes, but not often because it isn't a good English environment. Not many chances to speak English.
- Inf. 8 : I like to interact with locals
- I. : Do you? Do you think it's good practice for you to speak with local Singaporeans?
- Inf.11 : It's good to practice. But...it's difficult to interact with Singaporeans because they don't understand me and I don't understand them. But I start conversations with locals, not Chinese but Indians sometime...they speak better English.
- I. : What do you all think?
- Inf.7 : I don't like Singapore way of speaking, both English and Chinese. This is problem for me. Can't adjust to it.
- I. : What is it about the way Singaporeans speak that you don't like?
- Inf. 10 : I can't...understand what Singaporeans say as...they can speak many languages. But sometimes they put words together that sound strange and pronunciation is difficult to understand. I still talk with them in English.
- Inf.4 : Yes, it's the Singlish
- I. : Your views are very interesting. Let's have another group discussion about this next time.

## Excerpt B: An example of Group interview

Data: Group Interview (GI)  
No. of Interview: 3rd  
Interviewees: 18 students  
Date: 6<sup>th</sup> July, 2001  
Place: School classroom  
Length: 1 hour  
Transcript document no.: GI.3

### Prepared questions:

1. What are your feelings about your adjustment to life in Singapore so far?
2. Are you affected by the same factors?
3. Are there new factors with regard to the
  - a. Environment
  - b. Interaction
  - c. Other factors

I. : What are your feelings about your adjustment to life in Singapore so far?

Inf. 1 : My life is what I thought. I have been accustomed to living here

I. : This is good. Can you give me some reasons for your adjustment

Inf.1 : Maybe it's my character. Singapore is not the perfect place to study in but good turning point for people when they go abroad for the first time

I. : What do you mean by turning point?

Inf.1 : I mean that I can adjust to the new environment here. There must be difficulties but it will be fine. Oh...I mean, there are many similarities so it's not hard to adjust at first

I. : What about the others? Do you agree with 'H'?

Inf.2 : She is right...It's not a perfect place. As for me, I can feel stressed every day. Like the housing conditions...it makes me unhappy. I don't like to go home everyday

Inf.3 : Also me...worried about housing conditions

Inf.4 : I am unhappy with the living conditions

( 3 informants give reasons for being unhappy with their living conditions)

Inf.2;5;6: We can't watch TV with our landlords; We have to turn off lights early;  
Cannot cook

I. : Are there other factors that affect you all more than others?

Inf.1 : For me, I want to speak about these...For me, small differences in our life.  
Some difference in our lives between the Chinese and Singaporeans. First, it's about traffic problem. When I go in the street, I see some different customs. And also it's different with the way people walk. In China, they walk along the right side. But in Singapore way, they would walk on the left side. It is a problem because according to the old custom, I will walk on the right side. Of course, it's very dangerous. So, it's really a problem to adjust to these customs; they are from the environment. And also, some Chinese like to speak loudly, even maybe in public places and comparing to Singaporeans, they speak loud. It's a different custom. In Singapore, some people do...only in buses and (some) public places that are small. Because our motherland China is large (laughter)

I. : This is very interesting to me. Who feels this way too?

Inf.7 : Yes...I come from a big country...we come from a big country and we have many nice scenery. No views here.

Inf.8 : We can also speak about the directions. I mean...most problematic is getting used to the directions. Where is north, south? It's a problem for new comers.

I. : The last time some of you spoke about the weather. Do you still feel the same about it?

Inf.4 : Yes. Weather gives me a headache...can't concentrate in school

I. : Can I go back to your opinion that there are differences between Singaporeans and the Chinese from China?

Inf.1 : I think that, although I'm same in race but I'm different in culture and beliefs.  
I feel like a foreigner

I. : Can you give me an example of a difference in belief or culture?

Inf.9 : The Singaporeans go to church... and believe in ghosts  
(Informants give more short-sentence examples about differences in food, weather, political viewpoints, languages spoken)



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### Concluding reflections...

As I reflect on the implications of the findings for the research questions that had driven my research, I think back on the very beginning and try to remember if I have fulfilled all the obligations I have entered into, as a teacher, a student of research work and even a cohort member of this EdD programme. Working on this research has indeed required taking on multiple roles that not only involved engaging deeply in studying phenomena in this study and writing about them but also developing more awareness of pedagogic practice well as kindling new friendships with peers and students.

Often my thoughts are of an ex-colleague who had, a few years ago, both informed me of this programme and then encouraged me to take on the challenges of research work. While the first year of course-work and assignments was, on reflection, a flurry of attending classes after work and meeting deadlines, we both, together with others, managed to complete the course-work as well as saw many members over time eventually succeed in attaining their degrees. While every one of us went through the same process, although in varying degrees of perseverance and discovery, nothing had prepared me for the demands and rigours required for writing research work.

In preparing for the task of data collection, I had to follow many steps: thinking about the research questions, setting a criterion for the sample of informants, reading about different data collection methods, discussing methods with cohort members and supervisor, etc., where these activities were ongoing until I felt I was able to begin. Collecting data through interviews was actually quite enjoyable, and it seemed almost as though it was simply extending the frequent friendly exchanges and chats with the students in my class into formal data-gathering sessions, engaging in topics that were not only relevant to them but also interesting to me. On the most part, the interview sessions were relaxed, comfortable, familiar and relatively effortless.

Often, however, I found myself during collection having to make many choices regarding what to exclude and what to investigate further as important to the study, which involved sorting and grouping the data. In fact, many processes were going on: the students raised new and unanticipated issues regarding their adjustment, I examined the transcripts and selected salient topics and then devised questions to further investigate new issues. In a sense, it was what authors of the grounded theory method would describe as integrating data collection and data analysis where the process was recursive. Moreover, I was trying also to find links between the data and existing intercultural adjustment literature.

As for writing up the research, my own approach seemed to fall somewhere between the categories of Lofland and Lofland (1971), when they differentiated 'steady plodders and grand sweepers' (p. 140). While steady plodders write a little every day, slowly building up their analysis through writing about the details, grand sweepers work first on the outline and eventually turn it into written work. At first, I found that it was better for me to work on a general outline, organizing and detailing sub-sections and sub-categories until a time came when I had to work to turn it into a detailed written report. Then subsequently I worked for 3 to 4 days a week, and continued to the end as I alternated between periods of work and rest from writing.

I have gained much knowledge on intercultural adjustment and its many aspects. It is an area in which I not only have personal interest but it also continues to see new contributions from other theorists and empirical researchers. Learning about it involved not only thinking about and understanding it but sometimes it was only well after I had begun to write and related the data to it, and vice versa, that the overall ideas became clear. Moreover, I also felt, during writing, sometimes as if I had to somehow disappear from view, so to speak, becoming always vigilant about reflecting what the informants said and did, their theories and their impressions, so that I played down my own personal subjectivity and biases, frequently by resisting the temptation to write, 'I think what this informant is trying to say is that...' or 'In my opinion, this student is...' Supervisory advice always kept me on the right track and focused on their theories of adjustment, as

well as how they related to existing ones. Writing in the third person, although not compulsory, also helped me inject a certain degree of research objectivity.

In the end, although I feel that I am somehow *implicated* in the construction of knowledge through the stance that I have assumed in relation to the phenomenon, by interpreting the research data and attempting to link the research to other theories and research in selected reading, I have managed to complete a small body of work in an area that has always intrigued me and on which I have been fortunate to be able to research as well as write.

